

On The Cheap – Chapter 1 – Your Typical Iowa Family

Sid and Julie lived in northeastern Iowa. They had been childhood sweethearts and impulsive. Julie became pregnant in response to that impulsiveness. Happens all the time, doesn't it? Julie continued in school, but Sid dropped out. They married in a quiet ceremony attended only by their parents and Sid went looking for work. Pretty hard to find good work anywhere without a high school diploma, even in Iowa, but Sid eventually got a job working for a local delivery service, loading and unloading trucks. The job only paid minimum wage, which in this case was federal minimum wage. That was back in 1974 when Sid and Julie were 16. The hard work paid off, in a fashion, and eventually Sid became a driver. Iowa has right to work laws and Sid's employer wasn't unionized. But, the employer did provide health insurance after a fashion.

The insurance company defined Julie's pregnancy as a preexisting condition and wouldn't pay for the baby. It ate up every penny they had managed to save and in 1975, the young couple found themselves in debt. Neither family could help so it was up to them to earn their way out. It took them until 1985 to pay off the medical bills and have enough saved for the down payment on an old farmhouse. The farmer had sold off the land and was considering razing that old house and buildings when they bought it. The house sat on a 4-acre plot, which included a grove of trees, a corncrib, machine shed, chicken house, well house and barn. They got the place for \$50,000, including all of the buildings and the 4-acres. A lot of the old homes sold cheaply in the late seventies and early eighties. It wasn't unusual to find a home like that for \$20-\$25k. But, the land was valuable and the buildings had some worth.

They put \$10,000 down on the place and got a pretty good interest rate for the time. It looked like they could have it paid off in 30 years. Sid's employer's only retirement package was bonus equal to 1 month's pay for every year you worked for him when you retired at 65. But, in 1985, Sid was only 27 and they figured he had at least 8 years to put aside the house payments after the farmstead was paid for. Complications with the delivery meant that they would have only one child, but he was a fine young man. And Steve helped his mom in the garden. There were lots of woods in the area and Sid hunted squirrels, rabbit and pheasants for extra food. Not that it amounted to much, but the extra meat on the table, plus when he got really lucky included a deer, added up. Julie had a fixed household budget and every penny she didn't spend on food went into a savings account for a rainy day and Steve's education if he went to college.

Eventually, Sid quit driving and became the transportation supervisor as the company grew. It was still a small firm, even by Iowa standards, and all that really meant was a salary rather than hourly wages plus a bonus at Christmas time. Still, it wasn't a lot of money. Julie took a job once Steve was in school fulltime and nearly every penny went into that savings account. And money for school, clothing and special purchases came out of that same savings account. The job Julie had was working in the school cafeteria, another of those minimum wage jobs. Thus it came to be that the savings account grew very, very slowly. I guess that you would say that they were comfortable.

Sid had the Marlin 39A he'd gotten for his 16th birthday, before the problem came up. He also inherited a model 12 12-gauge shotgun from his grandfather when he passed on. Then when his father died, earlier than expected, Sid's mother gave him his father's Ruger Mark II. Sid saw lots of guns he would have loved to buy in gun magazines at the barbershop, but they simply weren't in the budget. No doubt Julie saw a lot of things in the Penny's catalog she would have died to have, but it wasn't in the cards. They paid cash for everything except for their home. And they defined necessity very narrowly, making exceptions only for Steve.

Steve didn't have a lot, but on his 12th birthday, Sid and Julie managed to buy him a Ruger 10/22 rifle and from then on, Steve went hunting with Sid. Let's see, that would have been in 1987, a couple of years after they moved into the farmhouse. Those were lean days; those first 5 years and Steve learned to value a dollar. Eventually, he figured out that his mother had only been pregnant for 7½ months when he had been born and Steve began to ask questions. That was when Steve got his sex education. His parents explained that they been young and foolish and had sort of done things backwards and that he was a full-term baby. Sid and Julie knew the question was going to come and had decided early on that only the truth would set them free.

Steve was surprised, but not shocked, at the revelation. Maybe he suspected anyway. He knew about sex because Sid had some animals on the 'farm'. Venison might be good, but beef is better. And who didn't have a sow so they could raise pigs for extra money. When he was old enough, right about the time he got that rifle, Sid let Steve take over feeding the livestock. They didn't have a bull or boar, so they made use of an artificial insemination service. There sure are plenty of those in Iowa. A couple of times, that old cow had twins and they only butchered 1 beef a year, thus they had a 'herd'. When the sow got old, Steve suggested to Sid that they keep a couple of those female pigs and increase the size of the pork herd. Market weight on a hog is around 225-250 pounds and at \$0.50 a pound, it would mean more money for the college fund.

When it came for school, Steve was a straight-A student. He ended up in the TaG, Talented and Gifted, program offered in his school. Steve wanted to be a Vet. In 1993, Steve graduated from high school, the Valedictorian of his class. That garnered him a 4-year scholarship for books and tuition at Iowa State University in Ames. There was that savings fund, but Steve only took money from it when he had no other alternative. He got a job working for the college to pay for his room and board. He studied very hard because he wanted to make grades. Because entrance into the DVM program was competitive, Steve didn't fool around with school. Besides, working that job for room and board and studying ate up all of his time. During his sophomore year, Steve met a girl named Rebecca, Becky, in one of his classes, English. Becky was a straight A student, the same as Steve, and they hit it off. Becky had her mind made up that she was going to get a PhD in Education and teach college.

ISU offers the following degrees in the field of Education: M.Ed. Practitioner, M.S., Ph.D. (see Curriculum and Instruction, Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, and Health and Human Performance). Becky parents were a little better off than Steve's and

they were helping her through school. She, too, had a scholarship, which paid not only books and tuition, but also room and board, greatly reducing the burden on Ralph and Lorraine. Ralph was the Manager of one of the five Hy-Vee Grocery Stores in Des Moines and Lorraine worked for the State of Iowa in the Department of Health. They were very comfortable. Becky had been edged out at Hoover High School for Valedictorian because there were several students with 4.0 averages in 1993.

“The career requires 5 years additional professional education; entrance into Veterinary Medicine professional program is competitive. Careers include: private practice in small, large, or combined animal practices; state and federal government inspection services, military, industry research and technical services. Starting earnings after the completion of the DVM average about \$48,000 for large animal practitioners and about \$40,000 for companion animal practitioners.” (This is 2004 information, so it should be about right on the money, or perhaps a little higher.)

Over time, the relationship blossomed and during their senior year of college, Steve and Becky started to talk of marriage. Not now, but when they finished their graduate studies. That was in the spring of 1997. Neither of them was in a hurry, their educations meant too much to them. They were perfectly normal young people in the 21-22 age bracket, but Steve knew to keep his trousers on and Becky wanted to wait. Pretty surprising for a young couple in 1997, but this was Iowa, not California, and most folks in Iowa are a little on the conservative side.

It's a pretty rare thing to get a scholarship to graduate school. Becky didn't but Steve did. Well, sort of. What he got was a commitment from a Vet Med Practice for books and tuition for DVM School. In exchange for that commitment of books, tuition and lab fees, Steve had to agree to join the practice for a minimum period of 5 years when he earned his Doctor of Veterinary Medicine. And, the sponsoring firm got to choose what Steve would study, in this case, large animal practice. This still left Steve short on room and board, but Sid and Julie had been salting the money away and there was enough in that savings account to cover those expenses.

The thing about it, DVM School is very difficult and that commitment to the Vet Med practice precluded Steve from taking a job. What Steve didn't know was that Becky's dad, Ralph, knew some Vets in Des Moines. Ralph and Lorraine were impressed with Steve and his goal and Ralph couldn't help himself, he talked to his friend the Vet and the next thing you knew... It wasn't really that easy, but Ralph didn't know that. The firm checked Steve out very carefully. He came from 'good stock', decent, hard-working people who raised a smart son who worked hard in school. Made it mostly on his own, too and that impressed them even more. Apparently they had concluded that Steve was worth the risk, the school isn't cheap.

Stephen, Steve, graduated in the spring of 2001. It was bittersweet, too because on the way home from graduation, his folks were in an auto accident. Sid was killed outright, but Julie was spared serious injury. A drunk driver hit their car in Sid's door less than 20 miles from home. Under the circumstances, the firm delayed Steve's starting date to at-

tend to his mother's needs. Becky still had to wait for the approval of her dissertation, so she wasn't yet a PhD. However, since her work was completed, the couple went ahead with their plans and married in July. They had planned a June wedding, but postponed it because of the crash and Sid's death. Final approval of her dissertation came on August 11, 2001.

A month later came the day where most people could tell you where they were when the planes struck the Pentagon and the WTC. Steve was at work and Becky was on her way to class at Grandview College in Des Moines where she managed to locate a job. Steve's contract with the Vet Med Practice had a clause that was invoked should he drop out of DVM School. In that case, he was obligated to repay the firm, with interest for his expenses to date. The contract also allowed Steve to resign from the firm. Each year he worked, they wrote off a year of the education expense. Maybe when Steve had his own practice after 4 years, he'd be making the big bucks, but the firm had only started him for \$40,000 with a scheduled \$2,000 raise for each year he stayed with the firm through the first 4 years. After that, he would be offered a partnership if they still wanted him to stay.

The job that Becky had paid the minimum teachers' wage and they weren't all that flush that first year or two. Becky got pregnant during the summer of 2003 and their first child, Jennifer, was born in 2004. At that point, Steve opted to buy out his contract with the firm. It seems that the Vet back in his hometown, Floyd, was planning on retiring in a year or so and he was looking for a partner. So with one year left to go on his contract, Steve and Becky discussed it and decided to move to Floyd. They had amassed enough savings to buy out the remaining year of Steve's contract and buy into the Practice in Floyd. It left them a bit on the short side of money however.

Sid and Julie's farmstead was a couple of miles north of Floyd and then west along the Cedar River. That probably explained part of the reason they'd gotten the place for the price they did back in 1985. The homestead was on one side of the road and the farmland that went with it on the other side of the road. The farmer had sold off the farmland, to another farmer who had the adjoining property. When Sid was killed, the mortgage insurance they bought paid off the loan on the homestead. Julie had continued to work for the school for all these years and was the Cafeteria Manager. She was tickled pink when she found out that Steve and Becky were moving to Floyd. Ralph and Lorraine were less than thrilled, but that's understandable. Floyd is in Floyd County about 5 miles west of Charles City, the County seat.

Julie was born in 1958 and she would be 46 in 2004. Steve and Becky were born in 1975 and would be 29 the same year. Julie had only been 42 when Sid was killed, but she'd never remarried. She wasn't all that old, but being a grandma seemed to make her feel a little older. She was a brunette the same as Becky and both of them stood about 5'6" tall. Julie had a little of the weight that people sometimes pick up, as they get older, but at 140#, she wasn't fat. Becky had a very nice figure before she'd gotten pregnant and she was working hard to get rid of the excess weight she'd gained carrying Jennifer. Steve was 6' tall and lean. He'd never had much fat on his body, but work-

ing those 4 undergraduate years had kept him trim. In DVM School, he'd found time to work out and managed to avoid putting any weight on. Then, when he'd gone to Des Moines, he'd gotten into running and that's a good way to keep the fat burned off.

There hadn't been any high school athletics because Steve hadn't had the time. Between the books and working on the homestead, he'd been plenty busy. He did have one 'essential' skill however; he was a pretty fair hand with a rifle and a good wing shot. Iowa is one of those in-between states. You can't own automatic weapons, suppressors and the like, but you can own most of the guns that states like California outlaw. Steve had inherited the Marlin, Winchester shotgun and the Ruger pistol, but had left them with his mother along with his 10/22 and that Remington 870 with the extra 20" barrel for deer hunting he'd worked so hard to earn the money for during high school. (Before someone calls me on it, I don't know what year Remington started marketing the express combo package. However, I had one back in 1982 when I moved to California. I just bought the shotgun and a separate barrel.)

Want some demographics? As of the census of 2000, there were 361 people, 142 households, and 102 families residing in the community. The population density was 236.2/km² (612.7/mi²). There were 147 housing units at an average density of 96.2/km² (249.5/mi²). The racial makeup of the city is 99.17% White, 0.00% African American, 0.00% Native American, 0.55% Asian, 0.00% Pacific Islander, 0.00% from other races, and 0.28% from two or more races. 0.00% of the population is Hispanic or Latino of any race.

There are 142 households out of which 33.1% have children under the age of 18 living with them, 62.0% are married couples living together, 4.2% have a female householder with no husband present, and 27.5% are non-families. 23.2% of all households are made up of individuals and 11.3% have someone living alone who is 65 years of age or older. The average household size is 2.54 and the average family size is 2.99. In the community the population is spread out with 24.4% under the age of 18, 9.4% from 18 to 24, 23.8% from 25 to 44, 29.4% from 45 to 64, and 13.0% who are 65 years of age or older. The median age is 40 years. For every 100 females there are 108.7 males. For every 100 females age 18 and over, there are 99.3 males.

The median income for a household in the city is \$35,096, and the median income for a family is \$36,458. Males have a median income of \$28,021 versus \$18,438 for females. The per capita income for the city is \$14,723. 6.4% of the population and 3.1% of families are below the poverty line. Out of the total people living in poverty, 10.6% are under the age of 18 and 12.5% are 65 or older. Small town Iowa and pretty typical. Democrats probably outnumber the Republicans about 52.5% to 47.5% if it is typical politically. Even has a motto: Floyd, where the sun always shines on kids.

And in case you don't know it a Vet will never get rich in a town like Floyd, Iowa, even if his wife works at the North Iowa Area Community College (NIACC) in Mason City. That's the cast of characters. Nice safe place, Iowa. Worst tornado in the history of Iowa occurred in Charles City on 15 May 68. There are lots of caves around Floyd, too.

On The Cheap – Chapter 2 – Moving to the Farm

That old farmhouse that Julie lived in had a basement of sorts. Time was when they built houses that didn't really have a basement. This house must have been built in the 'in between' period because it had a half basement, e.g., storm shelter. It wasn't really big enough to use for much of anything and Sid and Julie had always used it as a fruit cellar. Maybe it was just a local expression in that part of the country, but a fruit cellar was where you stored your canned goods and anything from the garden. Now days, people didn't store much fresh stuff like carrots. But you needed a place for the onions and spuds.

Rumor around Floyd County was that somewhere in the general area of that homestead was a huge cave. Kids had been searching for it for years. There had been a couple of boys from Charles City back in the late 1950's who had reportedly spent nearly every summer looking for that cave. Someone thought that maybe their names were Bob and Gary, but they weren't sure. About a mile and a half from the homestead was a farm that had the *Jesse James Cave* on it. Supposedly Jesse James and his gang had stayed there on the way to Northfield, MN for that raid that went bad. Steve had explored the cave and there wasn't any way that a gang that size would even fit in the place. Not that it was small, but it wasn't very big. There weren't many places to lie down and the place was muddy.

Steve didn't know what Charles City had looked like before the tornado had gone through in 1968, but his folks did and had told him about it. He was mainly interested in the storm. As Sid had explained it, the tornado came in from the southwest and lifted off the ground just before it hit the Floyd County Memorial Hospital. It had sat right back down and hit that house that belonged to that Ford Tractor dealer named Ott. It went east a ways and swung north. When it hit the Cedar River it split into 3 funnels. By that time it had cut a block-wide swath and on the other side of the river, it cut a 3-block wide swath.

The thing that stuck in Steve's mind was that the Ott house had stood through the storm after taking a nearly a straight on hit. He wanted to find out what made those folks home different. But, he'd put it off and by the time he was home from college one summer, the old man was retired and gone and the younger son was dead from cancer. The mother was also dead and the older son was somewhere in California, Palm Springs or Palmdale or someplace like that. Never did find out that the secret was that where the house should have had a 2x6, it had a 2x8, etc. Extra nails, too.

Floyd didn't have a high school and kids from Floyd when to high school in Charles City. But then, you wouldn't expect a small town, and getting smaller, to have a high school. Julie had worked in the high school cafeteria in Charles City for a long time. One of the advantages of being a Vet was that you had access to medicines that in a pinch could be used to treat human beings. It also indirectly made you a member of the 'medical community' in a small place like Floyd and Charles City and getting prescriptions for antibiotics and the like was easy. Old Doc Thompson introduced Steve to most of the doc-

tors at the Elks Club and they became pretty good friends.

Hunting was and probably still is a pretty popular activity in Floyd County. Sid had taught Steve the ins and outs and as I said, Steve was a pretty fair shot with a gun. Becky and Steve took an apartment for 6 months while they found a place they liked. Along about October of that year (2004) Julie admitted that she hadn't been feeling well for some time. Steve got her in to see a doctor in Charles City and they told her that she had Pernicious Anemia.

Pernicious Anemia is a rare blood disorder characterized by the inability of the body to properly utilize vitamin B12 (a cobalamin), which is essential for the development of red blood cells. The symptoms of Pernicious Anemia may include weakness, fatigue, an upset stomach, an abnormally rapid heartbeat (tachycardia), and/or chest pains. Recurring episodes of anemia (megaloblastic) and an abnormal yellow coloration of the skin (jaundice) are also common. Pernicious Anemia is thought to be an autoimmune disorder, and certain people may have a genetic predisposition to this disorder.

The three recognized forms of Pernicious Anemia include: Congenital Pernicious Anemia, Juvenile Pernicious Anemia, and Adult Onset Pernicious Anemia. The subdivisions are based on the age at onset and the precise nature of the defect causing impaired B12 utilization (e.g., absence of intrinsic factor).

Monthly vitamin B12 injections are the definitive treatment to correct the vitamin B12 deficiency. This therapy corrects the anemia and may correct the neurological complications if given soon enough. Since about 1% of vitamin B12 is absorbed (even in the absence of intrinsic factor), some doctors recommend that elderly patients with gastric atrophy take oral vitamin B12 supplements in addition to monthly injections. There is also a preparation of vitamin B12 that may be given intranasally (in the nose). A well-balanced diet is essential to provide other elements such as folic acid, iron, and vitamin C for healthy blood cell development. The outcome is usually excellent with treatment. Julie had caught the symptoms early enough and would be ok. However, her working days were over.

"Steve, why don't Becky and you move out here to the farm and I'll take your apartment," Julie suggested. "I'm afraid that the place is just too much for me anymore."

"Mom, why would you want to move to town?" Steve asked, surprised at his mother's suggestion.

"Your apartment is right near both restaurants and it's smaller than this old farmhouse," Julie replied. "Besides, in a year or two, you'll welcome the room when Jennie grows up a little."

"I'll agree to that on one condition," Steve responded after a moment's thought. "Your home is paid for. If Becky agrees, we'll move but only if we can pay your rent. You can consider it to be rent for the farmhouse."

“You sure you can spare the \$200 a month?” Julie asked.

“Mom, I’m a Veterinarian, for crying out loud,” Steve pointed out. “I think maybe we can spare \$200 a month.”

Not only was her son a Vet, he’d essentially put himself through college. He got him a darned nice wife too. She’d been in the house for a long time, 19 years, and it had a lot of memories, good and bad. It hadn’t been fair Sid getting killed like that at 42 by some darned drunk. The guy was still sitting in prison; Iowa didn’t take too kindly to vehicular homicide. Sid had missed the Vietnam War because he’d been 4-F. And this sickness was almost embarrassing. Imagine a Cafeteria Manager getting something like anemia. That doctor in Charles City said something about her autoimmune system, but she didn’t really understand and didn’t want to ask Steve.

“So anyway Becky, that’s what I told her,” Steve explained. “We’ll take the farmhouse and pay her rent equal to the rent on this apartment. We’ll have a lot more space for Jennifer.”

“Do you think I’ll have to take a job at NIACC?” Becky asked.

“Why would you, Becky, you’re not working now and we’re getting by ok,” Steve assured her.

“I’ve never lived on a farm before,” Becky said, “What’s it like?”

“Just like living in town except with an odor,” Steve laughed.

“What do you mean odor?” Becky asked.

“Well, around this area they call it the smell of money,” Steve continued. “Pig manure has an unsurpassed and unmistakable odor.”

“Phew,” Becky remembering the smell.

“Well, mom sold off the hogs and if you’d prefer, we don’t have to have any,” Steve offered.

“How can something smell so bad taste and so good?” Becky asked. “I know you just want to have some livestock to practice on.”

“It’s nothing like that Becky,” Steve assured her, “It’s like I always said. You can take the boy out of the country, but you can’t take the country out of the boy. Anyway, if we’re living on the farm, I’ll have time to look for that cave.”

“What cave?” Becky asked.

"It's just an old legend, Beck," Steve explained. "According to the legend, somewhere in the general area of that homestead is a huge cave. Apparently some kids got lost in it and after they found the kids, they used dynamite and sealed the entrance. The way I heard it, the cave goes clear to the Cedar River."

"If it goes to the river, why hasn't someone found the river entrance by now?" Becky asked.

"Supposedly, the river entrance is under water," Steve explained.

"All right, we'll move to the country so you can have some pigs to play with and look for the Phantom Cave," Becky laughed.

Steve borrowed a pickup and the next weekend they played musical chairs with the furniture. First, they loaded up a load of Julie's stuff and took it to the apartment where they unloaded it and hauled a load of their things. It was all rather awkward, and took 2 days to accomplish, but they were on the farm and Julie was in Floyd. No sooner had they settled in than Steve went looking for a heifer.

"You sure didn't lose any time buying livestock," Becky observed.

"The sooner the better," Steve explained. "The breeding age is expected to be at 14-15 months in a 60-day breeding season, either May – June and/or mid Nov. – mid Jan. This will relate to calving at 23.5 to 24.5 months of age or slightly earlier depending upon when we breed her. So, it will be about 18 months before we get milk. This heifer was weaned last month which put her at 6 months of age."

Guess it wasn't too smart to argue with a Vet, so Becky dropped it. Steve had occasionally played in the half basement as a kid and his to do list included converting that half basement to a full basement. He'd seen it done on one of Bob Vila's TV shows and knew it could be done. He was a Vet, not a mason, but how hard could it be to learn to lay concrete block? He picked up one of those how to books and studied until he thought he understood the process. Then, just to be sure, he picked up a few blocks and a bag of mortar mix and built a block fireplace in the backyard to hold a gas grill. That was very educational. Steve figured if he started in the early spring of 2005, he could have the basement done before the first snowfall, usually in October.

Steve mentioned his plan to Doc Thompson and Doc told him that Steve was forgetting his roots. Doc had a nephew who was a mason and could probably be persuaded to lend a hand when Steve got ready. Wouldn't do all the work, of course, but he'd probably make sure that Steve didn't mess the project up. BTW, Floyd County is politically the most conservative county in Iowa. But, in many ways, it's like a big family. That's something an outsider never learns. And as with all things, it's not that simple. But, if you know someone who knows someone, things happen. Apparently Doc talked to the nephew because the nephew called Steve up and came over to take a look.

“Steve,” Jim explained. “You’ve got yourself quite the project. The smart way to do it would be to have a house mover come in and lift the house. Then, we could tear out that old basement, put in the new foundation and block walls and set the house back down on it.”

“Jim,” Steve responded, “I appreciate the advice. But, Becky and I are on a budget here. I suppose that everyone thinks that Vet’s are rich, but in a town like Floyd, that’s just not true. So, I can’t be hiring a lot of outside labor. If this isn’t something I can do myself, with the help of some friends, like you, I’ll just have to scrap the idea.”

“Hold on a minute Doc,” Jim replied. “There’s always the barter system.”

“What do you mean?” Steve asked.

“Well, you’re a Vet,” Jim explained. “There are lots of people who don’t call a Vet because their animal isn’t sick, but could use the services of a Vet nonetheless. They can’t afford it because they don’t view it as a necessity. There’s a fella in Clarksville that does house moving. He has a mare that he’s been trying to breed without any luck. What say you check out his mare for free in exchange for him helping us with lifting the house?”

“That sounds suspiciously like I’m being set up,” Steve observed.

“Well, Doc did mention him to me,” Jim admitted. “He had a look at the mare, but said he wasn’t sure what the problem was. Told me that with your fresh education in large animal medicine, you might be able to do the trick. It’s worth a shot, anyway.”

The winter of 2004-2005 turned out to be pretty busy for Steve. Between Doc Thompson and Jim and the people they knew, it appeared that this was a doable project after all. The mare in Clarksville required surgery to correct a minor birth defect that interfered with the breeding process. Doc Thompson suspected as much, but he wasn’t an animal surgeon and couldn’t fix the problem. (Animal surgery isn’t cheap or so my cousin Mark, the Vet, tells me. He’s a horse surgeon in the Redlands, CA area. Does a lot of work on racehorses.) Doc Thompson and Steve only charged the guy in Clarksville for the supplies they used to perform the surgery. In turn, the house mover in Clarksville agreed to lift the old farmhouse and set it back down on the new basement for the price of the gas to drive from Clarksville to Floyd, a couple of hundred dollars at most.

There was block to buy and the mortar plus concrete for the footings and Becky voluntarily took a job at NIACC the second semester as a teaching assistant to pay for them. Julie volunteered to take care of Jennifer. Growing up in Floyd, Steve was unaware of the barter system, perhaps because Sid hadn’t had a skill that he could use for barter. You’re never too old to learn and Steve was getting an education fast.

Never heard of the barter system or the US’s ‘underground economy’? It’s a multi-billion

dollar business according to the government. Search the web for underground economy.

On The Cheap – Chapter 3 – Basement

The highway from Floyd to Mason City is a treacherous road. There are those curves over by Nora Springs that have claimed more than one life, and Steve really didn't like the idea of Becky driving that stretch of road. But practicality outweighed sentimentality and he agreed that she could work at NIACC for the one semester to pay for the basement. Because of his being a large animal surgeon, the practice in Floyd began to improve, too. Not that he was getting rich, but business had picked up a bit. Especially when the word got out about that mare down in Clarksville.

Another word for conservative is cheapskate, at least in Floyd County. Those farmers squeezed a nickel until the buffalo pooped and then sold the poop. It wasn't easy being a Vet in Floyd County. Most farmers' just took their problems to the cattle auction and sold them off rather than spending the money to get them fixed. Most, but not all. Can't remember, but I think that auction place is in Garner or Britt on the other side of Mason City. Anyway, it was out of Steve's area of service.

As soon as the frost was out of the ground, Jim showed up at the farm. He decided that it was time for Steve and him to start that project. The mover from Clarksville showed up and lifted that old farmhouse, too. Must have been pretty well built because he didn't have a single problem with the lift. He put in some massive supports for the beams so that Steve, Becky and Jennifer could continue to live in the farmhouse. The cost of the lift was \$150 for gas with the labor donated by the contractor. His mare was pregnant and he was a very happy and grateful man.

"This is a mighty peculiar basement Steve," Jim said. "I don't recall ever seeing one built out of limestone before."

"I wouldn't know anything about it, Jim," Steve said. "We moved here originally in 1985 when I was about 10. The basement was here at that time."

"After we excavated that soil for the new basement, I discovered that the whole house is sitting on a layer of limestone about 9' below the surface," Jim observed.

"Is that going to be a problem?" Steve asked.

"Not really, no," Jim explained. "Your foundation will be sitting on bedrock."

Then, as the men began to knock down the old basement walls and level the old basement floor, Steve and Jim discovered that the area underneath the old basement was soil, rather than limestone. This was very strange and they just sort of got started digging and didn't know when to stop. Next, they started to run into fractured blocks of limestone mixed with the soil. Apparently a light bulb went off in Steve's brain and he started to dig with renewed enthusiasm. About 10' down, some of that dirt began to slide off to the side into what must be a cave.

“Jim did you ever hear the legend about that huge cave that was supposed to be in this area?” Steve asked barely able to conceal his excitement.

“Who hasn’t?” Jim came back. “Are you thinking what I’m thinking?”

“Crawl down there where that dirt is sliding off with a flashlight,” Steve suggested. “We’ll know in a minute.”

“Hot dang!” Jim exclaimed from his prone position.

“What do you see?” Steve asked his excitement level rising.

“Biggest hole you ever saw,” Jim replied. “Steve, I think that maybe that cave wasn’t a legend after all.”

Jim, Steve and a couple of Jim’s men who were helping out began to excavate as fast as they could. In the matter of a few hours, they had removed all of the limestone and soil from the hole. The Phantom Cave wasn’t a Phantom Cave anymore. But that was a good name for it so that was what Steve called the hole in the ground. They didn’t really have time to explore the place; they had to get those basement walls installed. But man, talk about a storm shelter! Doc Thompson knew more about that cave than he’d let on. He hadn’t been around when those kids had gotten lost, found and the cave dynamited shut, but he’d talked to many of the farmers who had been in on the incident back in the 1920’s. And Doc didn’t know where the cave was located or that a half basement had been built over the entrance and a home over that. But, he knew that they’d followed the cave all the way to the Cedar River.

Somewhere along the river, according to Doc, was a limestone face. Beneath water level, that limestone face opened up into the cave, or so he’d heard. Bob Wahlstrom and Gary Ott had looked for the cave from 1956 to 1959 or 1960. They’d excavated a couple of the sinkholes on the other side of the road and one on the same side of the road, but had never struck pay dirt. The one sinkhole on the other side of the road was huge, 100-yards across at the top, and they had been positive that it was somehow tied into that cave system. But, they’d never found the cave; how could they, the entrance was in the basement of a house?

Excitement was the order of the day around the Cooper household from that point on. That was Steve’s last name, Cooper. But that excitement had to be put on hold until the basement was finished. By this time Doc Thompson was ready to retire. Doc and Steve worked out a payment arrangement for the remainder of the practice, effectively giving Old Doc a pension plan for the next 20 years. Doc had set the price a little on the high side and Steve had agreed. However, it appeared that Becky might need to work at NI-ACC for a while longer until the practice would support them and the monthly payment to Doc. Maybe Steve’s excitement over the cave beneath his house overshadowed his business sense, who can say? They would be living on the cheap for some time to come.

At Jennifer's first birthday party, Becky took Steve aside. In about 8 months, she told him, Jennifer was going to have a baby brother or sister. She had to confirm it with a doctor over in Charles City, but those home testing kits were pretty reliable and she was late. Steve was delighted, of course, and they immediately told Julie. Julie, by the way, was doing very well on the B-12 shots and the doctors were considering eliminating them entirely and maintaining her on oral medication. That evening after the party Steve thunked down in his old recliner to think. The basement had cost a little more than he had anticipated, but his mom had come through with the savings account that had been for his education. The remainder of the money was reserved for Jennifer's education and maybe for the new baby's. At least his mom had a rainy day fund, and in an emergency, Steve figured they could tap it. On the other hand, Sid and Julie had managed on a lot less income and even saved a little. So, Becky and he would just have to do the same thing.

"Honey, with the new baby and all, I'm afraid that you're going to have to keep working at NIACC for a while," Steve cautiously advanced.

"Why are you being so defensive Steve?" Becky asked, "I'd already figured that out."

"Well, we'd have been a whole lot better off financially if we'd have stayed in Des Moines," Steve observed.

"Money isn't everything Steve," Becky replied. "I like it here out in the country. It sure is a lot different from living in Des Moines. There's none of the rush or crime or any of the other things that are wrong with the big cities these days. Other than the occasional drunk driver, when was the last time there was a crime in Floyd County?"

"Not since we moved here, at least," Steve agreed.

"I can't think of a better place to raise a family," Becky stated, ending the discussion. "And you get used to the smell, sort of, after a while."

Becky was referring to the two yearling sows Steve had taken in exchange for his services to a farmer who was a bit down on his luck. There were chickens in that old hen house, too the 'gift' from another farmer who Steve had lent a hand to and only charged a fraction of the usual fee. Electrical power in that part of Iowa frequently comes from Rural Electrification Associations (REA's). Most of the time, they are steady on, but there are a lot of thunderstorms in east north central Iowa. Rather than have a freezer full of meat spoil, Steve had been forced to hit the savings account for a small gasoline power generator. He'd bought the smallest unit he could find and afford a 3kw unit. It was enough for the refrigerator and freezer (his mom's) and to run a few lights and the stove, barely. But, Julie had left behind 4 of her kerosene lamps and more than once Becky and he had lit the lamps and turned off the lights to run the stove.

Julie had replaced the old fuel oil furnace and kitchen stove with propane units while

Steve had been in college. When she moved to Floyd, she'd left the stove behind because the apartment had a stove. Floyd had natural gas service, but it didn't extend to the country. Most farmers' still used fuel oil furnaces or put in propane when it came time to replace their furnace. Julie had put in a 550-gallon tank so that she wouldn't run out in the middle of a winter storm. It had been a bear filling the tank the first time, but after she had it topped off monthly. At least the house had indoor plumbing, a bit of a rarity for a home built in rural Iowa in the 1920's or early 1930's. It wouldn't have surprised Steve to find a farm where the house was still heated with wood, coal or corn-cobs.

Most people in east north central Iowa would scoff if you used the term survivalist in their presence. Floyd is only about 30 miles, give or take, from the Minnesota border. Most everyone has heard about the snowstorms that they get in Minnesota, but Minnesota just isn't that far. Snow, when it came, could be a real problem. The schools built in about two weeks of snow days and more than once had to extend the spring dismissal to meet Iowa's minimum requirements for number of school days. Then, come spring, the Cedar River flooded every year when the melt off came. About 1 year in 10 was a doozy, too with Charles City taking a real hit. Floyd didn't straddle the Cedar River like Charles City did so they didn't have nearly the flood problem.

One thing led to another and Steve didn't get a chance to explore the Phantom Cave until the winter of 2005-2006. Becky was showing pretty good by the time he found the time and couldn't accompany him. When they put in the basement and reset the house, they'd covered the entrance to the cave over with a wood floor with a 'trapdoor' for lack of a better term. Jim had insisted that they build a set of stairs down to the floor of the cave, but they hadn't gotten more than 40-yards from the entrance. Cave exploration, spelunking as it's called, is not an endeavor one wants to tackle alone, especially in a cave that has been dynamited closed. There are any numbers of hazards including, but not limited to, falling rock dislodged by the dynamite just waiting for the unsuspecting explorer.

Right around the entrance, Jim's men had dislodged the loose rock that might be under the foundation of the house. No one had gone more than 40-yards from the entrance. Remember Floyd Collins? Yes? Then you're either a spelunker, smart as hell or pretty darned old. That happened in 1925. Then again, Doc said that the cavern had been dynamited in 1926. Gee, I wonder why? I'll bet that Gary and Bob never knew that. Yeah, they did. Ready to believe the story about the Phantom Cave yet?

"In 1925, Floyd was plugging away at his exploration of a wet rathole called Sand Cave, hoping to find major passages, perhaps even a link to the massive Mammoth Cave system. A little rock fell out of the wall and wedged Floyd's foot, 150 feet from the surface.

"Floyd was exploring alone, had only one light, was ill-clothed, didn't have a protective helmet, and had neglected to tell anyone where he was." Real smart Floyd! Don't forget, now – this is America's Greatest Cave Explorer. Relatives eventually noticed that Floyd was missing, and a quick check of his latest hangout confirmed the worst. The ensuing

rescue effort and publicity carnival lasted for 18 days and captured the ghoulish interest of the whole nation, via the relatively new medium of radio.

“They tried everything – digging and hacking at the passageway, sinking a new shaft, feeding Floyd to keep up his energy, and sending down reporter Skeets Miller, who chronicled the drama. A passage just above Floyd eventually collapsed, cutting him off for his last few days. As the historical marker matter-of-factly states, his plight ‘Aroused sympathy of nation.’ In the end, Floyd died.” Maybe that explains why the Iowa Grotto has a rule about never spelunking alone and why Gary and Bob were inseparable during the late 1950’s. By the way, Bob still belongs to the Iowa Grotto. He lives in Cedar Rapids, IA, just a little ways from Iowa City. He’s a HAM operator. K0EYO.

It was well into January before Steve and Jim ventured into the cave.

“Dang, this place is big!” Jim exclaimed.

“Just go slow, Jim,” Steve advised. “We only knocked down the loose rock for 40-yards. We wouldn’t want to get trapped down here.”

“You told Becky where we were going, right?” Jim asked.

“Yes and I set a time limit on our trip,” Steve answered. “Until we know that there isn’t any more loose rock, I limited our time to 1 hour.”

“One hour?” Jim complained, “If this place is as big as the legend, that won’t be enough time!”

“Hey, we have all winter, Jim. Better safe than sorry,” Steve responded.

“It looks like there’s a stream starting right there,” Jim said pointing his flashlight towards a spring. “We should test the water and see if it’s fit to drink. One hour isn’t very long.”

“Think in terms of ½ hour,” Steve chuckled. “We have to allow for the return trip.”

The 2 men slowly worked their way downhill to the northwest, according to Steve’s compass. When they had traveled about ½ hour, Steve called for Jim to stop. Although it would take them less time to return than it had to get this far, Steve didn’t want to worry Becky, especially in her condition. As it turned out, there wasn’t any loose rock they hadn’t removed. And, the cavern was even bigger than either man had imagined. Apparently, the entrance was just one of many branches to the cave. Steve had been out on the Internet and had read some articles about cave mapping. The next time they came down, they would start to map the cave.

On The Cheap – Chapter 4 – Cavern

What was it Spock used to say? “There are infinite possibilities?” Must have been in the TV series. The Phantom Cave, now called a Cavern, opened up all kinds of possibilities. But first, Jim and Steve had to map the place. Mapping a cavern is sort of like mapping a road in 3 dimensions. You start out with a point, usually $\frac{1}{2}$ way between the walls and stretch a line to the center point of the next pinch off or to the length of the line. Next, you move along the line measuring on the perpendicular to each side and the overhead. In the late 1950’s that was how Gary, Bob and Jim Hedges did it. Steve didn’t know that, but he wasn’t about to spend money he didn’t have to spare on instruments he’d only need one time. He searched until he found a description of the ‘old way’ and figured they do it like that. His compass wasn’t the best either, but it was good enough as far as he was concerned. Their survey equipment consisted of a couple of steel stakes, a spool of nylon line, a 100’ tape measure and a big hammer.

Over the course of the spring, the men mapped the cavern. On the second trip down, they followed the cave all the way to the water and after that, they began mapping. They had a pretty good idea how long the cave was as the crow flies, Steve had let out some line with a bobber attached on that second trip and they walked to the river and searched until they found the bobber. They fished it out and pulled the line taut. The line went under a limestone rock wall. This was pretty much as Doc had described it. On top of the embankment, Steve drove a stake into the ground deep enough that it would be difficult to dislodge it. This marked what he took to be about the center of the cave at that point.

Mapping the place proved to be more time consuming than they thought it would be. They were using a 100’ line and measuring at 10’ intervals. How many 10’ intervals are there in a little over a mile and a half? A whole lot (792), I suppose and it was working out about 50’ or 5 intervals per hour (158 hours). But, the further they went, initially, the bigger the cavern became, slowing them down. And, there were all of those side branches to map, too. And one of those, though not as large as the cavern, seemed to go on forever. They gave up mapping it pretty quickly. In time to come, they would resume mapping that branch, and would learn that it ended up in that big sinkhole 3 miles away on the other side of the road; more about that later.

Jim and Steve worked weekends from January to May. Becky was about ready to pop, so Steve called a halt to the mapping until the following winter. In early July, Becky gave birth to a 7lb. 5oz. boy and they named him Stephen Sidney Cooper. Jennifer’s middle name, by the way, was Rebecca. During the spring, Steve had the heifer and the 2 pigs inseminated. Now, Julie had a boy and girl to care for, but you know grandmas. In September, Steve finally took Becky down to the cavern. Becky had seen the map, but didn’t really have any perspective and the place nearly took her breath away.

“I had no idea this cave was so big Steve,” Becky gasp.

“Becky, it’s about a mile and a half to the river in a straight line,” Steve explained again.

“It should have only taken us about 160 hours to map the cavern but we’re barely half done and we put in nearly 8 hours a day, 2 days a weekend for 4 months. I figure that’s around 200 hours give or take.”

“How big is this room?” Becky asked.

“The ceiling is about 40’ high and the tunnel about the same width,” Steve replied. “You may have noticed that we’ve been moving steadily downhill. That passageway over there goes on for a long way. We stopped mapping it for now because it was taking too much time.”

“We could live down here if we had to,” Becky exclaimed.

“If they don’t end that war in Iraq pretty soon, we may have to,” Steve replied grimly.

“What do you mean by that?” Becky asked.

“How long has that thing been going on?” Steve asked. “Since 2003? Beck, it’s 2006 and we still have troops in Iraq. Those Iraqi forces can’t seem to handle the insurgents without our help.”

“I don’t really want to talk about that awful war,” Becky replied. “Show me some more of the cave.”

By this time, they were about ½ way to the river and near the spot where Steve and Jim had stopped mapping. Steve cautioned Becky that from this point on to the river was an area that Jim and he had only been down that one time. They continued on and reached the water pool that connected to the river. Steve hadn’t noticed the first time, but the cavern was surprisingly limited in the number of stalactites (top) and stalagmites (bottom). This suggested to him that the cavern wasn’t as old as he’d first thought it to be. They stopped again back in the large room. I didn’t mean to give the impression that the room was ½ way to the river. It was half way between the farmhouse and the ½ waypoint. The room was large, no doubt, because branches from several sinkholes seemed to converge in that one area. Jim hadn’t taken the inclination into consideration either. He and Becky were well over 100’ feet beneath the ground, measuring from the roof of the cavern to the surface.

“Honey, if you’re going to build some kind of home down here,” Becky began, “How about you put the kitchen or cooking place over on this side of the cave and the sleeping quarters on the other side?”

“Uh, sure Beck,” Steve replied absently storing the information. Steve was thousands of miles away, in Iraq in his mind. He shuttered as he thought about what he’d heard on the news the night before. The US had long since given up for looking for WMD’s in Iraq. That happened back in 2004 when the report came out. However, an American patrol had stumbled on a cache buried in the desert miles from anything. The cache

contained 6 containers. 4 of the containers were empty, but the other two held what were described as crude nuclear weapons. "Where are those other 4 weapons?" Steve thought.

Steve felt a sense of urgency that he'd never felt before. He'd run some used 2" water pipes to the cave, one for an intake and one for an exhaust. He'd tapped the savings account and had picked up a used 15kw propane fueled generator. They had a little extra cash and he spent it on food. He also moved everything stored in the basement to the cave. Then, he'd picked up some used electrical conduit and three coils of insulated 1/0 gauge wire, Black, White and Green in the heavy gauge stuff they used to wire homes to the REA in Floyd. He wasn't an electrician or a mechanic, but he connected the wires to the fuse panel according to the color. The other ends of the wires were wired through a manual transfer switch to the new generator. Nothing fancy, but it worked. He used an old radiator hose to connect the intake to the generator and connected the exhaust pipe directly to the muffler attaching it with duct tape.

"What's this stuff here, Steve? Duct tape?" Jim asked when he saw the cobbled together mess where Steve had coupled the pipe to the muffler down in the cave.

"I'm a Vet, for crying out loud," Steve replied. "How about you cut me some slack? I used duct tape because it was all I had."

"Hey don't get riled Doc," Jim said, "I think that it was ingenious, but you'd be better off with a solid connection so you're not leaking carbon monoxide. I have an idea and I know just the fella to do it. Where did you get the lumber for those beds and shelves?"

"The corncrib was falling down, so I helped it along and recycled the lumber," Steve admitted.

"Works for me Doc," Jim chuckled. "It looks like you're building a really nice storm shelter here, but why are you stocking it for a long stay?"

"Well, if you must know," Steve said, "I don't consider this to be only a storm shelter. Did you see the bit on the news a while back about those 4 empty weapons cases?"

"Do you mean the ones in Iraq?" Jim asked.

"Yep."

"I should have realized," Jim shook his head. "You're making this cave into a bomb shelter. Hell, you could put the entire population of Floyd in this place and have room left over. If I didn't know that you'd been raised in Floyd, I'd think you were one of those crackpot survivalists from California."

"Maybe they aren't crackpots Jim," Steve replied evenly. "Look, I have a wife and 2 kids to think about. Now let's get back to why I asked you to come over. Can you see any

way to plumb the propane tank to that generator?"

"Not really, but I'm no plumber," Jim responded. "I'm certain that it can be done. That gets me back to my idea. A pal of mine is a plumber and I think he can solve both of your problems."

"A plumber?" Steve reflected. "I don't have the money for a plumber."

"Who said anything about paying him?" Jim asked. "In the first place, he's a friend. In the second place he owes me. You can get the materials new or from the scrap yard and he'll help you make it work. But, we need to get him over here first and look it over."

"I guess it is ok," Steve allowed. "Is Saturday too soon?"

"I'll let you know if it's not," Jim said.

To this point, Steve had spent money sparingly, buying only the generator, switch and the heavy gauge wire. Everything else was from one of the two junkyards in Charles City and he had bought it as scrap metal, paying only 10 cents on the dollar as compared to the price of new items. Using the scrap conduit and pipes was labor intensive, but he figured he had all of the time in the world. Besides, Steve had other irons in the fire, namely the pigs were due. The gestation period for hogs is 100-110 days. The gestation for that heifer was 279-290, and possibly 6 days sooner. The difficulty in calculating when the heifer was due lay in the fact that she was a crossbreed of inexact origin and that she was from a line that produced twins. Different breeds have different gestation periods and twin-producing gestations are 6 days shorter. He didn't have to worry about the heifer just yet, but those pigs could come any day. Litter size is affected by several factors, but a good rule of thumb is on the order of a dozen live births. The sow will frequently lie on one or more of the piglets, killing them. A reasonable expectation is therefore about 10 piglets. And farrowing time is generally pretty busy.

An experienced farmer probably would have done better predicting when the sows would farrow, but these were the first pregnancies for the two sows, so there were too many variables. Steve ended up spending a lot of time at home keeping an eye on the sows. In the end, he ended up with 17 piglets after the first week. Good, but not great. But even a Vet needs a little practical experience and if nothing else, and Steve was learning. Steve and Becky were busy the fall of 2006 between the pigs, working on that storm shelter in the cave and working full time jobs. Steve had arranged for a neighbor's son to keep an eye on the sows should he be called away on an emergency, but it never came to that.

That plumber was a lot older than Jim and he was about ready to retire. He must have been impressed with Steve's efforts because not only did he provide guidance free of charge, he pitched in and made a couple of the more complicated connections. Steve had ended up running used $\frac{3}{4}$ " gas pipe because it was all he could find in the Charles City junkyards. The plumber charged him only for the cost of materials he provided. Ap-

parently the plumber had known Sid; Steve never found out for sure.

Being from Charles City and having over 400 cousins covering several generations, I tend to read the Charles City Press daily. One thing I've noticed is the longevity of people back in Iowa and especially from that area; they live quite a bit longer than the current life expectancy. Maybe they're just too darned stubborn to die.

Jim showed up after the first snowfall in 2006, ready to resume mapping the Phantom Cavern. Steve needed Jim's help again, but not for mapping. He had sawn out bed frames from the old lumber and talked Jim into assembling some beds.

"How many beds are you figuring on building?" Jim asked when Steve had him convinced to help.

"You're the one who said we could put up the entire population of Floyd in this cavern, Jim. So how about we build as many as we have time for today and tomorrow?" Steve hopefully suggested.

"Well, ok, but I never expect to get talked into building beds," Jim mused.

"Have either you or Barb thought about putting up some extra food?" Steve asked after they began sawing and hammering the frame together.

"What for?" Jim asked. "We have a pretty fair sized garden and don't buy vegetables from the store."

"How long would it take you to move your stuff over here if a situation came up?" Steve pressed.

"Geez, maybe an hour to load the pickup, quarter hour to get here and another hour to unload. Why?"

"We could put up some extra shelves and you could store everything but a month's worth of food in the cave," Steve suggested. "I sort of figured that mom would join us and Doc Thompson plus your family if anything came up."

"I'll have to talk to Barb about that Doc," Jim answered. "Appreciate the offer, but it will pretty much be up to her 'cause she'll be the one running out here once a month to restock what we use. How's the Vet business going?"

"Fair to good, all things being considered," Steve replied. "I guess you must think that I crazy or something putting in a shelter like this."

"Maybe yes, maybe no, Doc," Jim replied. "But then, who would have thought a bunch of hijackers would knock down the WTC and the Pentagon back in '01?"

On The Cheap – Chapter 5 – The Big Surprise

By this time, most everyone called Steve 'Doc'. Doc and Jim spent the winter of '06-'07 mapping the remainder of the main cave and exploring the branches. The branch that they'd started to map and stopped went for over three miles. The compass bearing indicated that it went to the northeast and Doc was pretty sure it crossed the road. It appeared to them that a large slab of limestone had broken off and blocked the exit. Jim found a pack of Pall Mall cigarettes laying on the slab and suggested to Doc that someone must have tried to get around the slab or rock at one time or another. His guess was pretty good.

(I dropped that pack of Pall Mall cigarettes during the summer of 1958. Bob spent about 2 hours squirming around on that slab of rock trying to retrieve them. He got within about a foot, but just couldn't reach them. We ended up smoking leaves and anything we thought might be good. Yuck. That was in the big sinkhole on the other side of the road I mentioned. I obviously changed a few facts for the story. The dynamited entrance was further to the east. We're pretty sure we found it, but couldn't get it open, even with 2 classmates helping us. The actual cave was reportedly about 4 miles long. Bob and I enlisted in the Air Force in 1961 on the buddy plan. He backed out at the last minute without explanation. When I got my first leave, I learned that his father had died of cancer. Bob's dad was a plumber. His mom remarried an electrician in Charles City named Ivan L. Brown. Maybe Hasher knows them; he knew that Buddy Holly was in the cave, or was that his ghost? Who was it they buried in his place? I was within 40 miles of Richie Valens in Iowa and I now live about 50 miles from where he is buried. Pure coincidence.)

That long tunnel to the large sinkhole gave Steve an idea. In the spring of 2007, he hired a demolition specialist to blast out the large slab of rock. When the dust settled, they had a back door to the cave. But, I'm getting ahead of the story here.

"Honey, how close are Jim and you to having the cave mapped?" Becky asked.

"We're done with the mapping Beck and just exploring the other passages, why?" Steve replied.

"Your daughter could use some of your attention if you could spare the time," Becky explained a little sarcastically.

"Hey, I'm real sorry, Beck," Steve apologized. "I guess I have been spending a lot of time underground. You get her bundled up and I'll get the sled and take her for a ride."

"I was thinking," Becky added. "She'll be 2 in a little while. Maybe we should get a dog for her."

"What did you have in mind?" Steve asked.

“When I was 2, my folks got me a German Shepherd,” Becky reminded him. “I told you about Robbie.”

“Who would have thought of naming a dog Rob Roy?” Steve chuckled, remembering. “I keep any eye out, Beck. I’m sure I can find Jennifer a Shepherd.”

At about 18 months, Jennifer was just beginning to enter the terrible 2’s. She was a cute little thing who took after her mother. You couldn’t really understand 90% of what she said and she jabbered a mile a minute. Becky had childproofed the old farmhouse and Steve kept the heavy wooden trapdoor to the cave shut at all times. Becky put Jennifer in her snowsuit, boots and scarf and Steve took her out for a sled ride. They had a good time playing in the snow and when Jennifer tired out, Steve took her inside and the 3 of them had cocoa. Little Steve was just 9 months old. Julie spoiled those 2 kids a lot, perhaps making up for all of the things Sid and she couldn’t do for big Steve when he was growing up.

“Can I ask you a question?” Steve said.

“It is may not can, honey,” Becky corrected him. “Sure what do you want to know?”

“Where on earth did you get the idea to buy me a rifle for Christmas?” Steve asked. “I can’t use it for deer hunting, at least not in Iowa. I’d bet that not 1 household in 10 has a center fire rifle.”

“It was Jim’s idea,” Becky claimed. “He said that since you were turning into one of those survivalists you should be properly armed for the role. He was probably only about half serious, but it got me to thinking. You remember that trip that I made to Des Moines with the kids to see my folks? I went to Smith’s and bought the rifle. Dad hunted around and bought some of those military surplus magazines for me. I picked it up on my way out of town on the way back home.”

“So that’s why you were gone for a week,” Steve observed. “That’s a pretty fancy rifle, it must have set us back a bunch.”

“Don’t ask,” Becky cautioned.

“I’d seen pictures of the M1A, but never thought I’d own one,” Steve continued.

“The next time we’re down in Des Moines, you can pick up some of that military surplus ammunition and learn to shoot it,” Becky instructed. “Maybe it was a silly purchase, but now that you have the rifle, you’d better learn to use it.”

“Expecting trouble are we?” Steve asked.

“You never know, honey,” Becky replied.

A month or so later during spring break, Steve, Becky and the kids drove down to Des Moines so her folks could see the kids. Steve asked Ralph how he happened to pick that particular rifle. Ralph said that they used the M14 in Vietnam when he was there, but had switched to the M16. Ralph, it seemed, had a pretty low opinion of the M16. He'd had one of the early models before the military solved the problems with the rifle. Ralph didn't explain about the chrome and the gunpowder, figuring that Steve wouldn't be interested. Ralph also explained that the M1A was the civilian version of the M14. He took Steve over to Smith's and suggested in the strongest possible terms that Steve buy 2 cases of the surplus ammo. He bought one case for himself and told Steve that the next time they were in Floyd, he'd bring his M1A and they could go shooting together.

Working in a grocery store, as he did, Ralph had seen it all. Every time they got a serious snowstorm in Des Moines, people would end up in Hy-Vee stocking up. Lorraine and he'd even been caught short one time. After that, Ralph had bought a set of the steel shelving and set it up in the basement. Lorraine and he went over what they ate and he ended up stocking that set of shelving with food. They had more food than they'd need for a snowstorm, but what if they got hit by a tornado or one of those heavy windstorms that happened once in a great while?

Ralph had gotten through Vietnam without getting his butt shot off. Those were in the early days before the big buildup. He and Lorraine were a little older than Sid and Julie and Rebecca had come along later in life for them. Ralph had a fancy for firearms and over the years had put together an impressive collection. He had been a skeet shooter at one time and had well used 20-gauge and 12-gauge Remington pumps. Then with the pressures of managing the store, he'd been forced to give up skeet shooting. Ralph was particularly partial to the M14 and had two of the standard model M1A's. Lorraine and he both used the rifles and were proficient with them, although Ralph suspected that Lorraine was losing interest now that she had grandchildren to capture her attention. Ralph had gotten a deer license one year in the drawing and had picked up a 20" barrel for the 870 with rifle sights. That had been before they'd brought out the rifled barrels.

After Julie and he had bought that old farmhouse, Sid Cooper had done his share of hunting in the surrounding woods. Those were pretty lean days and Sid didn't quite get around to buying a deer license. It was anybody's guess whether the state would give you one in the first place and Sid was subsistence hunting. The woods around the farmhouse were full of deer. Once, Sid even shot one standing without leaving the front porch. Sid's grandfather's old model 12 had taken a lot of meat while Steve was growing up. After he was promoted to supervisor, Sid stopped poaching because he couldn't run the risk. Sid and Julie couldn't afford a freezer at first and they'd ended up canning a lot of that venison.

Certain cattle have a propensity for twins. Saw them called twining cattle on the net. Most farmers don't care for them because they're a lot of extra work. The heifer that Steve bought was one of those twining cows and he got 2 calves the first time out. May have mentioned that. Anyway in the spring of 2007, Steve had 2 sows, 17 pigs, a cow

and 2 calves to care for, not to mention those chickens. A good cow can produce more milk than a small family can drink, especially after the calves are weaned. Julie suggested that Steve try his hand at making cheese.

“Mom, I don’t know anything about making cheese,” Steve protested.

“If you can learn to operate on livestock Steve, you can sure learn how to make cheese,” Julie responded. “I used to make cottage cheese when you were little, don’t you remember?”

“I think that it might be a little different making hard cheese than cottage cheese.”

“You won’t know until you try, will you?” Julie smiled. (See notes at end of chapter.)

With the first two calves, Steve was getting about 7 gallons a day on average. Got milk? Too much to drink and too little to sell. But then Julie knew that didn’t she? Guess that’s why she made so much cottage cheese when Steve was growing up. Steve got information from the net and Becky and he tried their hands at cheese making. Didn’t work out all that badly, but with her working and his practice picking up, they ended up putting in some long hours. He’d get up early, milk the cow, go to work, come home, milk the cow, help Becky finish making the cheese from the previous day’s production 2nd milking and this morning’s 1st milking and collapse. That went on 5 days a week. On weekends, Steve managed to find a little time for the kids and Julie would come out to watch and give Steve and Becky time to work on that stinking cave. That happened unless Steve got a call on the weekends, which were occurring more frequently.

Jim and Steve had ended up building 12 bunk beds, 24 bunks, over that weekend I mentioned. Barbara had eventually agreed to store some of their food in the cave, just in case. Of course, the trade off to get her to agree was that Jim had to drive out to the farm and retrieve the next month’s food. That was ok, because Jim went to the farm a lot anyway. They even got a few chances at what you might call dry runs, courtesy of some tornado warnings during the spring and summer of 2007. Doc Thompson would pick up Julie and Jim would grab Barb and the kids and they’d head out to Steve and Becky’s. Fortunately they didn’t get a chance to see how safe the cave was because the tornados didn’t show up.

The freezer had been moved to the cave and had plenty of chicken in it, plus Steve and Jim split a steer Steve bought from a farmer. He butchered a couple of hogs when they were about 6 months old and sold off the remainder. With his practice picking up, Steve suggested to Becky that this should be the last year she taught. The manure was becoming a bit of a problem because the garden just wasn’t that big so Steve just made the garden bigger. Julie came out that summer and helped Becky weed, pick and can. You can pretty well figure that Becky was glad to see fall come so she could return to NIACC and rest up.

Then, it seems that word leaked out around Floyd that Steve had found that old cave

they'd blown up back in the '20's. No one who had participated in closing the cave was alive to talk about it, but you know how legends and rumors are. Steve ended up giving an interview to the Charles City Press to try and quiet the speculation. He explained that as far as he knew, the only entrance to the cavern was through the basement of his home. He even let a Press photographer take a couple pictures to run in the paper. When the reporter and photographer asked about the side tunnels, Steve told them they all pinched off. The story buzzed around for a while, you know how small towns are, and then the football season started and people began to talk about football instead.

Around the world in the fall of 2007, things weren't terribly interesting. The US had finally gotten out of Iraq but the insurgents were giving the Iraqi government a very bad time. Iran and North Korea still were playing games on the subject of their nuclear programs. Israel and the Palestinians weren't any closer to an understanding than they been in 2004. In the US, there wasn't anything-noteworthy going on, just more of the same old big city violence.

Ralph and Lorraine had shown up for Jennie's second birthday party, of course, and Ralph had bought a new M1A. Steve admitted that he'd only found time to take his new rifle to the quarry once, clearly upsetting Ralph.

"That's what Rebecca told Lorraine, Steve, but I didn't really want to believe her," Ralph admitted. "I suppose that's why I brought that new M1A and 3 cases of surplus ammunition. I bought that rifle, over Lorraine's objections, for Rebecca."

"But why?" Steve replied, "We don't have much cause to use rifles like that."

"Steve, did you ask Rebecca to go shooting with you?" Ralph asked.

"No, I took the rifle with me to work and stopped by the quarry on the way home to try it out," Steve explained. "It really is a very good rifle. I didn't have any trouble at all getting used to it."

"How well did you shoot?" Ralph asked.

"Do you mean group?" Steve asked surprised. "About a 3" group at 80 yards."

"Steve, when Rebecca was 12-years-old, she was shooting 4" groups at 300-yards with one of those rifles," Ralph chuckled. "And by the time she finished high school, she could shoot a 2" group at the same range."

Notes:

Cheese is especially difficult to make because of the difficulty of finding what is called a starter – the bacteria culture added to the milk to start the curd formation. It is possible to make cheese without a starter, but the starter is what gives different cheeses their distinctive flavor, and without one the cheese almost always ends up tasting like pot

cheese, more commonly known as farmer's cheese or cottage cheese.

To make cheese: Take a hell of a lot of milk (10 gallons will make less than ½ gallon of cheese) and cook it slowly on the stove. For flavorful cheese, it is best to use unpasteurized milk, which is almost impossible to buy and must be obtained from a cow, or goats' milk, which tastes good even when pasteurized. As the curds form, add a cube or two of rennet, found at most specialty stores. This will cause the curds to coagulate. Constantly stirring the curds at this point will give you something more like mozzarella, which can be great. Instead, let the curds form naturally for something more like a jack cheese. Let the curds cook until you are satisfied with your yield, and then remove, placing them in cheesecloth and allowing them to drain. Then press into a mold.

Before you begin this adventure, remember that the reason there are 1000's of varieties of cheese is because there are 1000's of variations on the process outlined above.

Time cycle on milk production: 0 – Calf born; 15 mos - Heifer inseminated for first calf; 24 mos – First calf born – starts milking; 27 mos – Inseminated for second calf; 34 mos – Dried off; 36 mos – Second calf born – starts milking; and, cycle repeats for 5-6 lactations.

Milk is the source of nutrients and immunological protection for the young cow. The gestation period for the female cow is 9 months. Shortly before calving, milk is secreted into the udder in preparation for the new born. At parturition, fluid from the mammary gland known as colostrum is secreted. This yellowish colored, salty liquid has a very high serum protein content and provides antibodies to help protect the newborn until its own immune system is established. Within 72 hours, the composition of colostrum returns to that of fresh milk, allowing to be used in the food supply.

The period of lactation, or milk production, then continues for an average of 305 days, producing ~7000 kg of milk. This is quite a large amount considering the calf only needs about 1000 kg for growth. Within the lactation, the highest yield is 2-3 months post-parturition, yielding 40-50 L/day. Within the milking lifetime, a cow reaches a peak in production about her third lactation, but can be kept in production for 5-6 lactations if the yield is still good.

As you can see, the cow produces 7 times the amount of milk she needs for a single calf. Two calves cut the milk production (harvest) by a 2nd 7th. Twin calves tend to wean earlier. Where Steve ended up getting lucky in the first place was that the heifer even produced twins. It doesn't automatically follow that a twinning cow will produce twinning offspring, according to some sources. It appears that $\frac{6}{7}$ ^{ths} of the cow's production is about 45 liters a day; hence $\frac{5}{7}$ ^{ths} would be 37-38 liters a day, just short of 10 gallons. Heifers produce 30% less milk than mature cows.

On The Cheap – Chapter 6 – Family Affair

“You’ve been holding out on me,” Steve said to Becky that evening when they got ready for bed.

“What do you mean by that?” Becky asked.

“I didn’t know you were a championship shooter,” Steve replied. “You never said a word about it.”

“You never asked,” Becky frowned. “But I wasn’t that good.”

“Your dad brought you a new M1A and 3 cases of ammo,” Steve revealed.

“Really?” Becky squealed, clapping her hands together excitedly. “Well good, maybe you’ll go shooting more often, just to keep me company.”

“Beck, do we really need to turn this place into an armed camp?” Steve asked. “I’ve had a gun since I was 12-years-old, but it was always for hunting.”

“Steve, you’re the one who picked up on the news item about those missing Iraqi nukes and started building a bomb shelter,” Becky said. “I thought that was pretty astute of you. Daddy did too. And there’s nothing wrong with having a couple of rifles around. It’s a good wholesome hobby and you never know what might happen.”

Steve had been raised to think of a firearm as a tool. He didn’t object to having the rifles, especially now that he knew that Becky could handle herself around firearms. For some reason in that 6-year courtship, the subject had never come up. For a city girl, Becky had adjusted to the life of living on a farmstead pretty well. And, when his mom had suggested making cheese, Becky was right there preparing the milk. Come to think of it, she had taken to gardening and canning easily. They had been using a used office supply cabinet with most of the shelves removed as a gun cabinet.

“Do you shoot handguns as well, Beck?” Steve asked.

“Just Daddy’s .45 auto,” Becky replied. “Oh, and I used that 20-gauge of his to hunt pheasants. But, I can handle that 870 of yours, if I need to.”

“Any other surprises?” Steve asked.

“Just one,” Becky said turning off the bedroom light.

The next morning after breakfast, Ralph told Steve that he ought to build a proper shooting range. He didn’t particularly think that shooting in a quarry was all that good of an idea. He suggested that they have a look around the 4-acres and see where they could put in the range. Steve started to say something about the cost of building a range

when Jim pulled in with a small dozer on a trailer behind his truck. Obviously, some things were going on here that he was unaware of.

“I’ll take a cup of that coffee before we start grading the range,” Jim said.

“Am I the last one to know about things around here?” Steve asked pouring the coffee.

“Probably,” Jim said.

“Did you really have the idea to buy me the M1A rifle,” Steve asked.

“Whatever Becky told you is the way it was,” Jim evaded.

“Finish the coffee, you have some grading to do,” Steve smiled.

Steve had an idea where a 300-yard range could go and as it turned out, Jim had the same idea. When Ralph saw the location, he agreed. Jim used the dozer and graded a thoroughly adequate backstop and they went back to the house for lunch. After lunch, they decided to go shooting at the new range. Jim hauled a hard shell gun case from his pickup and some targets. He explained that since Steve had a M1A he figured he should have one too. Make a note; it is legal to have one of those FAL rifles in Iowa. However, Jim must have been thinking in terms of magazine interchangeability or something, or maybe he just like the looks of Steve’s M1A. Becky was rusty from the long absence from shooting, but she could shoot as well as Steve. Jim must have been practicing, because he out shot both of them. Then, Ralph took Becky’s rifle and showed everyone how it was supposed to be done. Lorraine might have lost interest in shooting, but Ralph hadn’t and he shot a nice 1 MOA group at 100-yards. Might have done better with a scope, but open sights at 100-yards was almost more than his eyes could handle.

Quite a development here, we have ourselves a regular shooting team. About the only thing that hadn’t been followed through on was that German Shepherd. After Ralph and Lorraine returned to Des Moines, Steve took Becky aside.

“I found her a German Shepherd, but we’ll have to wait a few more days to pick it up honey,” Steve explained.

“We’ll just tell her is a present for being a good girl,” Becky suggested. “We’d better not bring it up now, she’ll drive us nuts.”

Getting a large breed dog like a German Shepherd is problematical, at best, for a 3-year-old child. As a puppy, the child is bigger than the dog, for a few weeks. Then, the dog gets bigger than the child and the ‘fun’ begins. Becky couldn’t remember what it had been like for her, her first memories were from somewhere between ages 4-5. Lorraine tried to warn her, when she mentioned that they were thinking about getting Jennifer a Shepherd like Robbie. Becky, naturally, didn’t take her mother’s advice. Shep-

herds are family oriented as opposed to certain breeds that are person oriented. And, they are just naturally protective of the family. Steve and Becky agreed that the new dog would be an outside dog because of its size and Steve and Jim built a doghouse, which was placed near the farmhouse's front door. Steve knew not to put the new dog on a chain, because putting a dog on a chain could make them mean.

Later that month, Steve came home with the German Shepherd pup. True to form, Jennifer was excited, but then frightened when the puppy wanted to play. That dog must have had some sort of 6th sense; he immediately seemed to recognize that he was Jennifer's 'friend'. Still, he was a puppy and he had plenty of enthusiasm. Becky decided that they would call the puppy Rob Roy, Robbie for short. Steve really didn't care and Jennifer didn't understand. It was starting to get pretty cold at night in October of 2007 and Becky worried that Robbie would get too cold at night out in the doghouse. Steve pointed out that the farmer who had supplied the puppy kept his dogs outside and that Robbie was probably used to the cold. He'd put a nice layer of straw in the doghouse for the dog to lie on. Nevertheless, Becky found an old blanket and put it in the doghouse for the puppy to snuggle under.

This might be a good time to get everything into some sort of perspective. Steve was born March 19, 1975 and Rebecca was born April 16, 1975. In the fall of 2007, they were both 32. Jennifer's birthday was October 12, 2004. Little Steve's Birthday was July 5, 2006. The cave/cavern had been totally mapped by this time and there was that emergency exit at the bottom of the large sinkhole across the road and up a ways. The place was pretty well stocked, due to the large garden they now had. The freezer was kept full and Becky had to resort to canning meat due to lack of freezer space. Steve's practice had grown to the point that this would be the last year that Beck, as he called her, had to commute to NIACC and teach.

In October of 2004, the Washington Times Insider had carried an article about a group of 25 Chechen terrorists illegally entered the United States from México in July of that year. Steve didn't take the Washington Times and he knew nothing about the article. Neither did he surf the web much, those dial-up connections were pretty slow. Steve should have kept himself better informed. But, with the new baby (Jennifer) etc., he didn't have or take the time. Iowa, by the way, is an interesting state.

Iowa is 95.0% white, 2.2% black and 1.5% Asian. It was those Vietnamese the churches brought over after the Vietnam War. Ancestry was 39% German and 45% other, which included a lot of Norwegians. In my experience, a lot of Iowans are a bit arrogant when it comes to the subject of education. They like to talk about how good the Iowa school system is, whether that is true or not. Especially those older folks who can remember how it used to be when Iowa was the most literate state in the US, like in the 1950's. Iowa and California used to trade 1st places but now California was 50th and Iowa was 30th.

Now, if you were a terrorist and wanted to make a statement, what would you do? The Chechen terrorists seemed to have a thing for schools. After crossing the Mexican bor-

der back in 2004, they tried to lose themselves in Phoenix. It was ok at first, but when fall came, those snowbirds started to show up. A lot of these folks were from the upper Midwest. Although the terrorists had intended to move west and attack a school in California, the article in the Washington Times Insider put the leader of the group on notice that the authorities were looking for them. This caused a change in plans. They ended up heading to Chicago. However, once there, they decided that they'd fit in better in Michigan. And there they sat from 2005 on, trying to decide on a target.

"What would you like for Christmas?" Steve asked.

"I don't know, surprise me," Becky responded.

"Give me an idea, at least," Steve urged.

"Would you be too awfully upset if I asked for something that I would consider practical?" Becky asked.

"I suppose that would depend upon your definition of practical," Steve replied, nuzzling.

"If you're going to be like that, forget I mentioned it," Becky replied coyly.

"All right Beck, anything you want under \$1,000," Steve said exasperated.

"I want a riflescope like Daddy was talking about when they were down here for Jennifer's birthday," Becky said.

"Sheesh," Steve responded, "Well, I opened up my big mouth, didn't I? I'll call Ralph and see if he can get me a good price on one from Smith's."

"He can," Becky said.

"How would you know?" Steve asked.

"Trust me on this, honey," Becky answered. Beck just loved her little secrets, but after that birthday party and the range, Steve reevaluated what he knew about his wife. He suddenly realized that there was a lot of Ralph in Beck and that she was more survival oriented than most anyone he knew. Why did he have a sinking feeling that they were going to end up getting identical Christmas presents? Maybe because you're learning, Steve, it takes a while, like a lifetime.

Let's get back to that cave for a minute or two. None of the other Iowa papers had picked up on the article in the Press and Steve had almost forgotten about the interview he'd given. Every once in a great while, though, someone would show up and inquire. Could they see the cave? Usually it was some high school kids, but not always. Some guy from Cedar Rapids, Bob Wall-something-Steve didn't get the last name-wanted to have a look around. Bob seemed to know an awful lot about that cave and began to tell

Steve stories about when he was in high school in Charles City in the late 1950's. It seems that Bob and his friend had looked for that cave for about 4 years. They thought they'd found it about 2 miles east of the farmhouse, but hadn't been able to dig out the rocks. Steve was about to tell Bob sorry, but no, when Bob happened to mention a pack of Pall Mall cigarettes and told a story about losing them in that big sinkhole.

This Bob was retired from what had been Collins Radio at one time. He was an Extra Class Ham operator and it turned out that he was a friend of the older Ott boy. Steve wanted to know about the Ott house so he told Bob that he'd let him have a look around the cave if Bob would tell him about that house. Bob said that in all the years he'd known Gary, he'd never been in the house, but that Gary had talked about its construction so he would be glad to exchange information. Steve asked Bob to wait a minute and went into his desk. He had that pack of Pall Mall cigarettes in a zip lock bag and gave them to Bob. Bob laughed and said he hadn't smoked in years and that he doubted that 50-year old cigarettes would be much good anyway.

"We were convinced that this cave went on for about 2 miles east of here," Bob said.

"It might have at one time," Steve acknowledged, "But there's a blocked passageway. Say, you don't suppose that there were two entrances and they blew up both of them do you?"

"Can't really say," Bob replied. "We were just high school kids and those farmers' wouldn't tell us very much about the cave. I see that you've made the place into a storm shelter."

"I was hoping that you wouldn't notice," Steve commented, a little embarrassed.

"Where is that passageway that goes to the big sinkhole?" Bob asked.

"That's the passageway on your right, Bob," Steve pointed.

"Ok if I have a look?" Bob asked.

"Well, on one condition," Steve said. "You have to promise to never reveal what you see."

"I'd promise anything to see the end of that passageway," Bob said, "you have a deal."

Two miles and an hour and a half later, they arrived at the big sinkhole where Steve had gotten that rock ledge blasted out.

"Whoa," Bob said. "Some of this almost looks familiar, but it has been almost 50 years. This can't be the big sinkhole, there was a slab of limestone that I couldn't squirm around."

“I had that slab of limestone blasted out, Bob,” Steve explained. “Only 3-4 people know that besides you; and I want to keep it that way.”

“What’s to keep some high school kids from coming in through the big sinkhole?” Bob asked.

“Have a look for yourself, Bob,” Steve replied.

And, Bob did just that. What prevented some kids from doing what he described was a very heavy steel grate that was padlocked shut from the inside. Steve unlocked the grate and it took the both of them to lift the grate. Bob had a look round, walked to the top of the sinkhole to confirm his location and returned to the bottom. At the bottom near the grate was a sign, which read, “Caution Falling Rock Hazard. Do Not Enter”

Author’s Note: This story will include a combination of flashbacks to when Steve (Doc) and Becky were growing up plus flashbacks or comments about when I was growing up in the area in the 1950’s. Getting confused with the timeline? Me, too but this, and probably my last, story is by request. I’ll try to warn you from now on. Eastern north central Iowa is an unlikely place for a survivalist story, but you’re just going to have to wait and see what happens. I may even end up appearing in the story as myself in 2008, but I’ll have to dream up some kind of excuse. And, I’m a Trekie, what can I say?

On The Cheap – Chapter 7 – Clementine

*In a cavern
in a canyon
excavating for a mine*

*dwelt a miner
forty-niner
and his daughter
Clementine*

Bob and Steve spent the remainder of the day looking around the cave. After they'd been down to the water, Steve showed Bob the passageway he'd mentioned. It came off the big room and went maybe 300-350-yards, where a large slab of limestone blocked it. Bob speculated that perhaps the limestone had been weak and had been dislodged by the blast that had been used to seal the cave where Steve's house was located. Bob also said that he'd really like to map the cave.

"Bob, we've already mapped the cave and I rather not leave you running around down there," Steve said. "Would you settle for a copy of the map?"

"Sure, Steve," Bob replied, "I just wanted the information and if you already have it, that's good enough for me. I really appreciate it. My mother is gone and my brother moved away from Charles City, so I'd have to stay in a motel anyway."

Steve gave Bob a copy of the map Jim and he had prepared and sent him on his way. Bob went into Floyd and got a motel. The next day he was back at the sinkhole. He set up a transit and sighted a line that intersected the center of the grate and the center of the house. Then he read the compass and got the exact direction from the grate to the house. He noted the direction and wrote it on the edge of the map, after which he packed his things up and headed back to Cedar Rapids.

Steve noticed Bob's car on the way to Floyd the next morning and looked over and saw Bob working with some sort of transit. But, he was running late and didn't stop. When he returned home later in the day, Bob was gone and he forgot all about it. A few weeks later, he received a letter in the mail from Bob.

Dear Steve,

I took a bearing on the sinkhole to your home. Then I overlaid your map and one Gary Ott and I made in 1959. As you can see, your map is off by a couple of degrees, but I assume that is probably because you used a cheap compass.

Our map shows all of the sinkholes in the area and Jesse James cave. I drew a dotted line from the sinkhole we tried to open to where that tunnel is blocked off. If we were right, you might want to blast out that slab of limestone and see what's behind it, I think

you'd be surprised.

Thanks for letting me look around.

Happy Spelunking,

Bob

“He was a little odd,” Steve thought after he’d read the letter, “But maybe he’s right. I’d better find that demo guy and see about taking out that slab.”

“Beck, do you remember that guy from Cedar Rapids?” Steve asked.

“Sort of, why?” she asked.

“Got a letter from him with another map,” Steve explained, “He says I ought to blast that slab that’s got that one branch closed off.”

“Guess you’d better do it then, honey,” Becky replied. “Didn’t you tell me that he and a friend spent a lot of time around here about 50 years ago?”

“Yes, I did,” Steve said. “Bob told me what the secret was to that Ott house standing through the tornado back in 1968. Seems that the old man had some friends of his build it for him. They were from California and built custom homes. The house was built to be earthquake proof, too. When the plans called for a 2x6, they used a 2x8 and extra nails. Bob said he drove past the house after the storm. Apparently the ends were bulged out like a sealed tin can would be if you boiled it. His friend later told him that the old man had knocked a hole in each end of the house, put up some 4x6 beams on the ends and pulled them together with some sort of come along. Had to re-drywall the inside apparently and they just drove the nails back in before they put up the new drywall.”

“Very interesting dear,” Becky said in her ‘who cares’ tone of voice. (But, true!)

Steve looked up the demo expert and showed him the slab that he wanted removed. The demo guy said he was willing to give it a try, but that he couldn’t promise anything. Steve watched him drill the holes for his charges. The first hole went right through the slab and they got a tape and measured. The slab, at that point was only about 40” thick. The guy then drilled a series of shallow holes and loaded them with charges. They backed up to the main room and off to one side and the fella let it rip. The explosion was surprising small, in Steve’s opinion, but supposedly this guy knew what he was doing. When they went back to the slab, it had been reduced to a pile of boulders. They moved a couple of the smaller ones out of the way and Steve shined a powerful hand lantern down the passageway that had been revealed. Bob had been right, the passageway was bigger than the main room and the light wouldn’t reach the end.

Dear Bob,

Thanks for the suggestion. I had it opened and the passageway is huge. Come on up to Floyd anytime and we'll map it out.

Regards,

Doc

Steve got Jim out to the cave as soon as Jim had a free moment. They now had hardhats with battery-powered electric lights mounted on them. They didn't try to map the cave or anything. They just explored it. Steve really hadn't realized that the branch leading to the slab ran downhill. The passageway beyond obviously did and he made a note to check with a level. The room here was nearly twice as wide. The demolitions expert had mentioned before he left that the slab he'd blown out before had been dropped in place with explosive. Steve had wondered at the time how many holes had been blasted back in the '20's. (Three, actually.)

"Would you just look at the size of this place," Jim remarked in surprise.

"That guy from CR said I'd be surprised and I'd guess he was right," Steve agreed.

It took them 4-hours round trip to explore the cavern. It was the biggest part of that cave and it also lacked stalactites and stalagmites. The two men had a winter's worth of work ahead of them clearing the boulder pile. They started the next day with sledgehammers and the rock seemed to crumble before them. That made it a whole lot easier and it only took them 4 weekends to clear the rock.

Dear Doc,

I got a hold of my buddy from high school days. He can't make it until spring, if at all. I figure I ought to wait and see if he shows up to do the mapping. We made a pretty fair mapping team and can probably do it faster than you.

Happy Spelunking,

Bob

o

Dear Bob,

We cleared the broken limestone and have the passageway open. I'll wait on the mapping until I hear from you.

Regards,

Doc

◦

Dear Bob,

I sure would like to make the trip and I'll try. Have to tell you though; I probably won't be much good to you. Got this neuropathy really bad now and can hardly hold a pencil or walk. Don't wait on me. How's retired life?

Gary
KD6GDQ

◦

Dear Doc,

Doubt my friend can help me map it. Go ahead and do it if you have the time. He may show up though and if he does, he'd surely like to see it.

Happy Spelunking,

Bob

Steve had noticed that the sinkhole that Bob and his friend had worked on in the '50's was no longer there. Apparently the farmer had covered it over and recovered his land. He decided not to bother and try opening the sinkhole from the inside. The sinkhole had stopped eroding because of that large slab that had been removed. However, with it covered over and the cavern underneath packed with soil and rocks, it wouldn't start eroding again anytime soon. (I didn't say never.)

*Never lend your car to anyone to whom you have given birth;
Never test the depth of a river with both feet;
Never stand between a dog and a fire hydrant;
Never teach your children to be cunning – you'll be one of their very first victims;
Never say 'oops' in the operating room;
Never try to pick up a woman who's wearing a Super Bowl ring;
Never interrupt an enemy while he's making a mistake;
Never ask what goes into a hot dog;
Never call a man a fool – borrow from him;
Never be afraid of the deafeningly obvious – it is always news to somebody;
Never marry for money – you can borrow it a lot cheaper;
Never tell a woman she doesn't look good in some article of clothing she has just purchased;
Never start a project until you've picked someone to blame.*

Never say never. What is the origin of that phrase? (I looked for 3 hours and I'm good at this Internet research. Wikiquote says it's an English proverb.) Steve and Jim went ahead and mapped the branch they'd opened at Bob's suggestion. Then, Steve carefully added the branch to the map that Bob had provided and sent a copy back to Bob without a note. Bob sent a copy to Gary with a note.

Dear Gary,

The owner of the entrance of that cave sent me the completed map. We were right, but as you can see we probably could have never gotten that sinkhole open. That passageway would have blown our minds if we'd ever gotten it open. I forgot to tell you; the guy offered to give me back that pack of Pall Mall cigarettes. They might be a little stale, but I can get them and send them to you if you want.

Bob

◦

Dear Bob,

My caving days are over and I switched to KOOL's. For a while there, I was writing Patriot Fiction and posting it on a website. You might want to check out some of my stories in the Completed Works part of the 'The Writing Squirrels' section.

Floyd is a small town. From the looks of that cave, they could build a municipal shelter in it. One of my stories, I can't remember which, maybe the weather story, talks about living in caves after a disaster. That war may be over in Iraq, but I have this sinking feeling in my gut that we haven't seen the worst of it. I know that it's unlikely that Floyd County would ever need a shelter like that, but I still remember the 1968 tornado.

Best,

Gary

Bob sent a copy of Gary's letter to Steve. Steve read it and figured that Gary Ott must have become one of those California crackpots. Becky picked the letter up later and became very interested in what the guy from California had to say. She went to the website and read his stories. His grammar wasn't the best, probably used Word to check his Spelling and Grammar. But, she found the story about the weather to be spell-binding.

It was the spring of 2008. Steve had suggested to Becky that she wouldn't have to return to NIACC in the fall because his practice was good enough to support them and their life style. Steve hadn't sold off any of the calves, opting instead to feed them to butcher weight and have them butchered and cut up by the locker plant. He was feeding old Doc Thompson, his mom, Jim and Barbara and their family and themselves. The hogs were a different matter. He was up to 6 sows now and was producing about 75

pigs a breeding season. It made it tough being the Vet for Floyd and raising a herd of livestock, but he was getting accustomed to putting in very long days. Because there were only 24-hours in a day, Steve had hired a farm boy from a neighboring farm to handle the milking and feeding the livestock except on weekends.

That spring, Becky had Steve get every inch of available space plowed up for a garden. This even included the area between the backstop and the 300-yard mark that they now used exclusively for shooting the rifles. Steve had been right in his assumption and they both now sported those Mk IV scopes on their standard M1A's. Her Daddy had a surprise for them at Christmas that had been a real shocker. First of all, he gave them suppressors for their rifles. She had started to ask where he came up with them, but was told, "Don't ask." Suppressors are illegal in Iowa. Iowa LEO's are pretty narrow-minded on the subject of compliance with the NFA. They were the Surefires with the optional quick attach mount. Secondly, Ralph and Lorraine announced that they were retiring and thinking about moving to Floyd.

Becky had been holding back on Steve, a little. She had been setting aside about $\frac{1}{3}$ of her take home pay in a savings account for a rainy day. She figured that if he caught on, she'd just tell him it was an education fund for the kids. Julie and she had been hitting garage sales, estates sales and the like and they had a couple of thousand 1-quart mason jars stored up. They'd also acquired 2 additional pressure cookers, giving the two of them 4 cookers and the capacity to can 28 quarts of vegetables or meat at a time. Becky and Julie were busy during the summer of 2008, canning an extraordinary amount of vegetables. They enlisted Barbara to help them and she hit the garage sales picking up extra used metal shelving for the cave. And, they did it all on a pretty tight budget. Garage sales were definitely the way to go.

Gee this Steve must be pretty dumb. His wife is holding out on him, money wise and in every other way, perhaps except for the bedroom. (Don't talk about sex much in my stories.)

On The Cheap – Chapter 8 – More Surprises

Who is Clementine and what does she have to do with anything? Is Doc really that stupid? Clem is the gal in Floyd who did Steve and Becky's tax returns. She pointed out to Steve that the direct deposits to their bank account didn't square with the paycheck stubs that Becky had provided. She also pointed out a miscellaneous direct deposit noted on the paycheck stubs that was about $\frac{1}{3}$ of Becky's take home pay. This had all happened the year she prepared their first tax returns way back when. Steve said something to Julie about it and Julie told him to cut Becky some slack. She was probably just putting money away for a rainy day or for Jennifer's education. Steve bit his lip and never said a word. Each year, Clem gave him a number representing the additions to that direct deposit account and he assumed that they had a pretty good 'secret' savings account.

Julie was getting by pretty good. She had a small pension that she could start drawing when she was 55 and because of her medical condition, qualified for state aid. Steve pretty much kept her in groceries and paid the rent on the apartment. She wasn't saving any money, but she didn't have to hit the savings account very often. And, she didn't have any expensive vices like drinking or smoking, so all in all, she was doing fair to middling.

"I'm going to put up a lot of food this summer," Becky had announced. "You'd better be thinking about butchering some beef and pork and we'll can it."

"What do you intend to do, Beck? Feed the whole town?" Steve had asked.

"Yep. That's exactly what I intend to do," Becky said. "Mom and Dad's house will be done soon and she can watch the kids. Your mom and I are going to can up a storm. Barbara is going to pitch in and help too."

"What set you off?" Steve asked.

"I read some of the stories that Ott guy wrote on Frugal's website," Becky explained. "I found that one about the weather to be very interesting. I won't try and tell you it's all that much of a great story, but he has a point. Besides, I saw that letter Bob sent you."

"How are we going to pay for all of this?" Steve inquired.

"Well, I have a savings account that you probably don't know anything about," Becky replied.

"You mean the secret account where you've been putting $\frac{1}{3}$ of your take home pay since you started at NIACC?" Steve retorted.

"How did you know about that?" Becky asked.

“Clem discovered it when she did our first tax return,” Steve explained.

“But you never said anything,” Becky protested.

“I talked to mom about it and she said that maybe you were saving money for college or something and that I should just cut you some slack,” Steve continued. “So, I did. But, I have a pretty good idea how much is in that account, depending upon how much you’ve taken out for various needs.”

“Good. I’m glad you know about that account,” Becky said. “Look, did you see that thing in the Ott guy’s letter about him getting a sinking feeling in his gut?”

“Yes. So what?” Steve asked.

“I read his fiction, honey,” Becky explained. “It’s mostly about preparedness. He bases several of his stories around a couple of his friends and he calls the group ‘The Three Amigos’. He doesn’t have a great record with his gut feelings, but it’s probably above average. Anyway, that cave could hold the entire population of Floyd and part of the population of Charles City in an emergency. You know how the people are around here; most of them probably wouldn’t show up, even in a serious emergency. But, it wouldn’t hurt to take some precautions. Daddy says that he can probably unload our home canned goods every year to help out people less fortunate than we are. So, it wouldn’t be like we were putting up a ton of food just to sit there and spoil.”

“I was wondering why you wanted such a big garden,” Steve admitted. “What other plans have you made?”

It took quite a while for Becky to fill Steve in on what she had planned. They needed more electrical power for the cave and Jim could get an electrician to do some wiring, Barb would see to that. They also needed to put in a new ‘used’ propane tank to handle the extra generator. She had been checking around and had found one. She assured him that she had more than enough money in that account to handle everything. She also said that once they had the shelter well stocked, they were going to have to use the Press and maybe some other papers to get the word out to the residents of Floyd County. Women really do rule the world, you know; they just let us think we’re in charge. Ask Bill Clinton if you don’t believe me.

Barbara had Jim running every which way assembling that used shelving in the cave. Becky had Steve get some of the livestock butchered and they put the choice cuts in a second, used, freezer she bought. The roasts and other cuts were cut up and canned. With Julie spending so much time at the farmstead, Becky suggested that she just move back to the farm. Julie didn’t want to impose, but Becky had her mind made up and it was a large, old 4-bedroom house. That put \$200 a month back in the budget right off the top. And, Julie started to add to her savings account immediately because she didn’t have the utilities to pay and wasn’t spending money at the restaurants any longer.

Plus, Barbara started to pick up blankets and all sorts of survival oriented stuff at the garage sales and estate sales. She just brought her kids out to the farm and Lorraine watched the whole lot. Daddy, Ralph, pitched in and gave Jim a hand and pretty much supervised the food accumulating in the cave. He had been in the grocery business, after all, for a very long time. Neither he nor Lorraine mentioned that he had retired on his doctor's advice. Something about a heart problem, but they didn't want to worry Becky. The doctor had told Ralph to get more exercise and he did just what the doctor ordered. Lorraine had in 30 years with the state and could opt to take her pension at 55. There was a small discount for every year she retired before age 65, but the discount didn't equal what she'd draw by retiring early, not by a long shot. (\$78,000 in my case, and a lot more in hers. I only had 19 years in when I quit my job, but she had the full 30. There is also a discount for the number of years worked, and the denominator of the fraction is 30. I got 19/30 of the full pension minus the 10 years.)

Now Ralph paid a whole lot more attention to what was going on in the world, especially since he'd retired. He hadn't started out to be any sort of survivalist, but first came those groceries on the shelf and there was his gun collection... And, Ralph had been in Vietnam and he knew the world wasn't a nice place. Ralph knew a whole lot more than he let on, which probably explained, in part at least, where Becky got her sand. Julie, Becky, Barbara and Ralph began to hunt around for a large standby generator. They found one at a hospital that had just shut down in Wisconsin. It was a big modular unit and they only bought one module. It would run on natural gas or propane and Ralph saw to it that it was converted to propane before they moved it to the cave.

The real shocker came when they went to fill that used propane tank that Becky had bought. Her savings account took a hit that almost wiped it out; but Ralph and Lorraine had pitched in because they had savings and would be using propane from the tank. Ralph had built their home on a parcel of wooded property not all that far from Steve and Becky's. The cost of running a propane line over to his house was less than putting in a new tank, so he did the former and kept the large tank topped off.

Ralph had never shown his entire gun collection to Steve. He had several pieces that he'd somehow managed to smuggle back from Vietnam. That had been a chore; the military didn't seem to be fond of the idea of returning servicemen bringing home souvenirs of that type. Ralph and his squad had happened upon some Viet Cong stores like several cases of AK's. Somehow, a portion of the captured VC weapons, still new in the box, had disappeared. Once home, magazines hadn't been much of a problem and Ralph had rounded out his supplies over the years. Only Lorraine knew of this and she had to keep her mouth closed for fear of him going to jail for a very long time. Becky knew that her Daddy had a separate cabinet of guns she'd never seen the inside of. It was made pretty plain at an early age that whatever was in the cabinet was none of her business. But, Dr. Rebecca Cooper was nobody's fool and she half suspected that it had something to do with Vietnam. (PhD, remember?)

What an unlikely group of survivalists. They were in Floyd County Iowa, the most conservative in the state. One was a Vet, a second a PhD. Then, there was the Grocer and

the Health Department worker. Add to that the Contractor and the Housewife plus an old retired Vet and a slightly disabled Cafeteria Manager. But they had access to a rather large cavern and it was starting to become very well stocked towards the end of summer in 2008. You couldn't just blab it all to the Press either, ask Kenny Stabler, the guy who had built the bomb shelter in his backyard in Charles City. He had been the talk of the town for a long time after he built the shelter. (Pre Cuban Missile Crisis.)

If you were to look around the farmstead, you'd find the machine shed converted to storage. All of those extra glass jars had been in there before the canning began. There were also all sorts of things that people had discarded and Becky, Julie and Barbara had picked up for pennies on the dollar. There were even several boxes that held issues of Mother Earth News going all the way back to 1970 and issue #1. Those had come from an estate sale and apparently no one knew how valuable they were or they just hadn't attended the sale. (They sold off my dad and stepmother's stuff for pennies on the dollar in 2001. They had some really good stuff, but it barely paid for the sale.)

In the fall of 2008, Steve and Jim began to drop hints around, especially in the town of Floyd, that if TSHTF, people should consider heading for that cave on Steve and Rebecca's farmstead. Eventually, the Press got wind of the rumors circulating around Floyd and a reporter contacted Steve about doing a follow up story. The reporter claimed that he'd heard that the cave was being converted into some kind of municipal shelter. They strung the reporter along for a while and then invited him and a photographer to tour the cave.

"As you can see," Steve explained, "We opened up a branch that had been closed by a landslide. The area is pretty large and we can probably handle several hundred people in an emergency. My mother and wife put in a large garden and did a lot of canning, so we have enough food to handle that many folks. I don't really expect much use for the place, but my father-in-law and wife think otherwise."

"Who owns the cave?" the reporter asked.

"Whoever owns the land above it, I'd expect," Steve suggested. "But the only entrance is in our basement, so we pretty much control who goes in and out."

"We did a little looking around before we came," the reporter said. "We noticed that large sinkhole a ways down the road on the other side and the sign. What can you tell me about that?"

"One branch of the cave runs up to that sinkhole," Steve said. "But apparently whoever blasted the cave shut back in the '20's blasted the sinkhole too. We tried to blast out the slab of limestone but everything around there was too fragile. You can get into the hole a little ways and then you run into all kinds of loose rock. So, I put that grate in to prevent people from going in and getting hurt. The fella that owns that land agreed with me. Neither one of us wanted to be responsible for anyone getting hurt or killed. Since it was my blasting that made the place so dangerous, I paid for the grate."

“This branch you opened up is surprisingly dry,” the reporter observed.

“Now, yes,” Steve said. “Probably was pretty muddy before they dynamited that sinkhole closed.”

“Where was that sinkhole?” the report asked.

“Up yonder a ways,” Steve replied. “You can’t find it anymore, the farmer filled in the hole and is growing crops where it used to be.”

“I see,” the reporter said, but didn’t. “Tell me, this cave supposedly comes out in the Cedar River. Do you have any idea where?”

“Afraid not,” Steve said.

They took some pictures and ran a brief story in the Press, under the banner, “Eccentric Vet and His Cave”. The reporter had been subjected to an information/disinformation campaign that would have made Madison Avenue proud. Some of the members of the Floyd Town Council decided to have a look for themselves. Where did the Press get off calling Doc Cooper eccentric?

“So, tell me Doc,” Bob Bennett asked, “Is that story in the Press accurate?”

“Bob, it’s as accurate as I wanted it to be,” Steve said. “For instance, that entrance in the big sinkhole is open and it’s our ‘escape’ hatch for want of a better term. And since that many people would need some place to go to the bathroom, we set up composing toilets in a branch off that branch. The other sinkhole is covered over, just like I said.”

“How many people could you folks handle down here?” Ron Smith asked.

“The entire town of Floyd and about a like number from the area,” Steve speculated. “I suppose if push came to shove, maybe as many as 1,000. The problem isn’t the room. It’s the supplies. The girls canned all summer long and we have close to 2,000 quarts of meat and vegetables. There is some stuff in the freezers, but not enough to make any real difference. If you really want to make this into a municipal shelter, the Town Council is going to have to spend some money.”

“What do you need?” Herb Spencer asked.

“Staples, mainly. Stuff with a long shelf life packed in nitrogen,” Steve suggested. “My mom supervised putting in a kitchen based on the high school cafeteria, only larger. Because of the circulation and such, we had to use electric stoves. Now, that used standby generator that Becky and Ralph put in will handle the kitchen and lights but not much else. To really do things right, we’d need a third generator and another propane storage tank.”

"It seems to me Doc that you've made quite an investment in the community already," Bob Bennett observed.

"That was mostly Becky's doing, Bob," Steve smiled. "I just stayed out of the way."

"Still," Herb added, "I suppose that we ought to do something. Floyd doesn't have too big of a budget, you know."

"Maybe I can help you there, fellas," Ralph spoke up for the first time. "I can get you staples at wholesale and we can add oxygen absorbers ourselves. You'd be surprised at how much food we could put up for a couple of thousand dollars."

"Putting in a propane tank and extra generator won't be any easy task," Ron said.

"True, Ron, it won't," Herb agreed. "On the other hand, there's that old propane tank sitting there in town that nobody's used for a long time. How about we vote to move it out here?"

"I'll move it for you if that's what you decide," Jim offered. "That way, the Town of Floyd won't be out any money to get it here."

"How large of a generator do you need?" Ron asked.

"Not too big," Steve said. "We could get by pretty good with a 40kw unit. Know anyone who has a 40kw home standby system just sitting around they're not using?"

"I wonder..." Herb Spencer said.

"You wonder what, Herb," Ron asked.

"Didn't Ed Mitchell have a standby generator on his farm for the dairy operation?" Herb replied. "He died last month and I understand that Florence is going to have a farm sale. Maybe we could talk her into donating the generator to the Town of Floyd."

"How big of a generator was it?" Bob asked.

"40kw, just like the Doc said he needed, I think," Herb replied. "Ed put it in so that he'd never have trouble getting power for his milking machines. People don't mind waiting, but dairy cattle expect to be milked at a certain time twice a day."

"Herb, you know Florence best," Ron said, "Why don't you talk to her about it?"

"I'll do that," Herb said.

On The Cheap – Chapter 9 – Florence

“I just don’t know, Herb,” Florence said. “Ed had that generator for years. The power has been pretty regular and it spent more time running itself once a week than it did powering the milking equipment.”

“It’s entirely up to you, Florence,” Herb replied. “I do know that a whole bunch of people would be helped out if you could see your way clear to donating it to the town. We could take the tank, too. I’m sure you can sell of the propane in it. And, I’m pretty sure that the Town Council would do something to recognize the contribution.”

“Let me think about it and I’ll let you know,” Florence announced.

“Ok, Florence,” Herb said, “You take care now.”

In the meantime, Jim had moved the tank from town to the farmstead. Herb had put off talking to Florence because he knew that Ed didn’t have much life insurance and Florence could use every penny from the farm sale. A plumber had donated time and used materials and had connected the two tanks. He’d also completed the installation of the intake and exhaust system for the large standby generator from the hospital in Wisconsin and had run an extra line for Ed’s generator, just in case. There was also the matter of water to deal with and he put in a salvaged water tank and collection system from that spring. What had been the main room, originally, now held the industrial sized kitchen, the water tank, and the generators. It also held a communications shack. That guy from C.R., Bob was it? Well, he’d donated a couple of old used radios and antennas. Apparently Bob still read the Press online and he was sitting there in CR getting quite a kick out of the whole thing.

Dear Gary,

That guy up in Floyd converted that cave to a municipal shelter. I bought myself a new radio and donated some old HAM equipment to them. I suppose one of them is going to have to take the trouble to get a General or higher license, but that’s not my problem.

How did you ever get started writing? Man, do you have a doom and gloom attitude; you ought to lighten up. I read a couple of your stories and you have terrorists under every darned bush. I can’t believe it’s all that bad.

*Bob
KOEYO*

◦

Dear Bob,

I believe that it really is that bad! Remember the article in the Washington Times in 2004 about the Chechen terrorists sneaking across the Mexican border? We never heard any more about them and it's been 5 years. Where did they go? You'd have to live in someplace like California to appreciate how bad things can really be.

How did I get started? Seemed like the thing to do at the time, what can I say? Turned out I have a depression problem, just like my mom. Wish I could find my certificates for the Extra class exam I passed. With the 5wpm code requirement, I could finally be even with you.

Don't make fun of that guy in Floyd. I read the Press, too. I think maybe he's got the right idea.

Gary
KD6GDQ

"Then, by unanimous consent, the Town Council of the Town of Floyd votes to donate \$2,500 for the purchase of food for the Municipal Shelter," Bob Bennett announced.

"I never thought that they would vote for that big of an expenditure," Jim said.

"I never expected that we'd get that generator from Mrs. Mitchell," Steve countered. "We'll get Ralph started on buying the staples. It was a pretty good idea to put that small propane tank of Mitchell's at his place. He filled it and had them dump the other 2,000-gallons in the new tank."

It didn't stop there; I'm pleased to say. The doctors in Charles City cleaned out their supply cabinets of physicians' samples and donated them to the cause. They were all expired, but they all knew that the samples were good for a long time. The pharmacies in Floyd and Charles City retrieved the out dated prescription medicines from the trash cans after the missionary men left and gave them to Steve too. Then, the Cub Scout Pack ran a drive in the Floyd area and collected bandages for the first aid clinic that had been added to the shelter in the main room. Local minister began a campaign to stock the shelter with more blankets and used clothing and by Christmas 2008, the Floyd Municipal Shelter was stocked with absolutely everything it might need including lots of grains packed in 6-gallon white plastic pails.

There were a fair number of HAM operators in Floyd and they donated surplus radio equipment. They also helped Becky get a General license. Old Doc surprised everyone when he showed up with a lot of new and refurbished medical equipment he'd bought. He had things like BP cuffs, thermometers, syringes, casting materials, burn kits and the like. Steve had kept him well supplied in good cuts of meat and maybe it was the old guy's way of showing his appreciation. Old Doc had even bought a new defibrillator for the Fire Department and donated the old unit to the shelter.

As of the census of 2000, there are 16,900 people, 6,828 households, and 4,711 fami-

lies residing in the county. The population density is 13/km² (34/mi²). There are 7,317 housing units at an average density of 6/km² (15/mi²). The racial makeup of the county is 98.11% White, 0.23% Black or African American, 0.09% Native American, 0.43% Asian, 0.09% Pacific Islander, 0.44% from other races, and 0.60% from two or more races. 1.31% of the population are Hispanic or Latino of any race. There are 6,828 households out of which 30.50% have children under the age of 18 living with them, 57.70% are married couples living together, 7.70% have a female householder with no husband present, and 31.00% are non-families. 28.00% of all households are made up of individuals and 14.60% have someone living alone who is 65 years of age or older. The average household size is 2.40 and the average family size is 2.92. In the county the population is spread out with 25.10% under the age of 18, 7.00% from 18 to 24, 24.40% from 25 to 44, 24.20% from 45 to 64, and 19.20% who are 65 years of age or older. The median age is 40 years. For every 100 females there are 93.50 males. For every 100 females age 18 and over, there are 90.40 males. The median income for a household in the county is \$35,237, and the median income for a family is \$41,133. Males have a median income of \$30,285 versus \$20,867 for females. The per capita income for the county is \$17,091. 9.30% of the population and 6.50% of families are below the poverty line. Out of the total people living in poverty, 13.00% are under the age of 18 and 5.70% are 65 or older. Floyd County according to 2000 voter records had 16,256 people (1999 estimate) and a total vote of 7,299 or 44.8% of the estimated population.

(Des Moines) Record turnout at the Presidential caucuses has fueled a surge in Democratic voter registration. Numbers released by the Iowa Secretary of State show 24,000 more Democrats are currently on active voter rolls than in March of 2003.

At the same time, Republican voter rolls decreased by nearly 14,000.

Also fueling the Republican decline is an increase in No Party registration, which rose by over 14,000 voters.

As of April 1, 2004, the state records 1.83 million registered voters, up slightly more than 23,000 from a year ago.

The Democratic gains represent a significant shift from a year ago, and narrow the gap in party registration to a near dead heat.

“The shift in voter registration highlights the groundswell of support for Iowa Democrats,” said Iowa Democratic Party Chair Gordon Fischer. “Longtime Iowa Republicans are leaving their party because they recognize that the GOP is leading the country and the state in the wrong direction. New voters are rejecting the failed ideology of George W. Bush, and embracing the Democratic message.

“Democrats are promoting jobs, education, and affordable health care. We’re the party of working families. Republicans are the party of deficits, under-funded schools, and tax breaks for the wealthy. It is a clear choice, and more and more Iowans are recognizing

that the Democratic Party represents Iowa values.”

Oh, well, that was old news. So were those terrorists holed up in Michigan; you know, the Chechen people. The US government had long since given up looking for them. As the world entered into 2009, the Russians and the Chechen's were still going at it. There was a lot of resentment over those kids being killed back in 2004. Israel had now killed more Hamas dissidents than there were people in Floyd County and still they came. Back when the 40-day mourning period ended, Reuters and AP reported that it didn't seem likely that anyone would take revenge. More old news, and wrong, too. Or, maybe it was all in how you looked at it. People had started disappearing. Maybe they all went to México and crossed the border into the US. I suppose you might want to believe that if you were Chechen or Russian or a Muslim. Just like the US believed that it had killed Abu Musab al-Zarqawi back in 2004. (He was killed in June, 2006.)

In the years they'd been in Michigan, the Chechen terrorists managed to persuade others to join them. Their group was now up to 36 men. The leader of the group still planned to hit a school even after nearly 5 years in the United States. Interestingly, Utah claimed that it had the highest literacy rate in the nation, and it boasted the highest percentage of high school graduates and the highest average number of years of school completed within the general population. Utah also consistently ranked among the leading states for the percentage of college graduates.

Half of the Utah state budget supported education, ranking Utah first in the nation in expenditures for higher education. Modern schools, outstanding instructors, and state-of-the-art resources characterize Utah schools. In fact, the public education system is so exceptional that only about five percent of the population attends private schools. The state was home to nine public colleges and universities and ten private institutions of higher education. The University of Utah and Utah State University in Logan garner millions of dollars in research contracts each year. Brigham Young University in Provo, on the other hand, is renowned for its computer science program. The state even operates a Center for Excellence Program that encourages new or existing companies to benefit from the cutting-edge technologies developed in the universities.

But Iowa had 59 colleges and Universities, a pretty high density for a bunch of 'dumb farmers'. What was the source of Utah's claim? Data from 1992 that was sure relevant in 2008. 19 vs. 59 and that was just in the higher education department. There were a lot more things to consider than things like literacy rate and number of schools, like the possibility of getting away and striking a second and third school. The State University in Ames, Iowa boasted a fairly heavy concert schedule, he'd noticed while researching the Department of Education and the various college websites. The school had Stephens Auditorium and Hilton Coliseum where many events were held. Stephens had a capacity of 2,609 according to the website and Hilton held around 14,000-15,000. There was the 45,814 capacity Jack Trice Stadium, too. The beauty of a place like Ames, Iowa was the easy access to I-35, which could take them north to Minneapolis, MN. Once safely sheltered in the 'Twin Cities', they could find another target or move on north to Ontario and freedom.

Most concerts were held either in Stephens or in Hilton. A spring concert was scheduled in Hilton with a top drawing name entertainer. Yes, Virginia, they have bomb-sniffing dogs in Iowa, too. Didn't have many and didn't use them much, but they had them. Then again, you had to suspect something, anything, before you employed dogs like that. Hitting a spring concert at a state college in the middle of Iowa probably wasn't at all what the terrorist organization had in mind when they'd sent the 25 men to México back in 2004 to cross into the US. However, 5 years of living in the US had proven to be the undoing of the goals of the terrorist cell or at least its leader. What difference did it make anyway he'd rationalized. So, that attack was on for the spring of 2009 at ISU.

I'll bet you're wondering why Doc didn't use solar power and biodiesel and gasohol and all of those things that were in widespread use around Iowa. Well, he only had 4 acres of land so the biodiesel was out, for him anyway. Iowa produced a lot of biodiesel and everyone else was into recycling everything. Solar power may have been a good idea, but they were committed to propane. Gasohol was what every service station in Iowa sold as gasoline all year long, rather than just in the winter like they did in California. Wind turbines required wind to run them and Iowa hadn't gone there, yet.. And when it got windy, the wind really blew. He could have produced a little methane, but lots of farmers were killed by methane and he used his manure on his garden. Different strokes, I guess.

On the other hand, they had that Municipal Shelter ready and all they needed was an excuse to use it. Ralph's other gun case contained an even dozen AK-47's and he had a whole lot of the Wolf ammo stocked up plus those surplus magazines he'd been accumulating. The thing was, when you thought about it, most everything they had in terms of equipment was used, second-hand or previously owned, take your pick. Most, not all. "Improvise. Adapt. Overcome." Or, *this is the AK-47 Assault Rifle, the preferred weapon of our enemy. It makes a distinctive sound when fired.* (Loved that movie.)

And somewhere along the line, they'd acquired good used M1911 pistols. The Floyd Town Council had even put together something of an evacuation plan. It wasn't much, the population of the town was barely over 360, but there were the school busses for people needing transportation out to the farm. Gary never made it back to Iowa, but Bob wasn't surprised. Every time he said he was coming, as Bob had learned, he never made it.

On The Cheap – Chapter 10 – Dumb Luck

“Honey, could we get tickets for that concert down at ISU in May?” Becky asked.

“I don’t see why not, but who’s performing?” Steve asked.

“Celine Dion, dear, I told you that,” Becky reminded him.

“See if you can get tickets, Beck,” Steve suggested. “Where is the concert, Hilton or Stephens?”

“Stephens is way too small, silly,” Becky said, “It’s in Hilton.”

A few days later, Becky seemed to be in a pretty bad mood and Steve figured he done something wrong, again. He avoided the issue. If it were important, she’d explain. She did, but not for a while. It seems that the Dion concert was all sold out. She’d even called some Professors she knew in the Education Department and they couldn’t help her get tickets. Becky was very disappointed, and that’s an understatement. Steve told her that maybe they should just show up at the concert, there always seemed to be a ticket scalper hanging around with tickets for the best seats in the house. Becky countered that she didn’t like Celine Dion enough to pay those kinds of prices and that if they were going to blow money like that maybe they should catch her in Vegas the next time she was headlining. Steve said that it was probably just as well; the sows were due around that time.

The Chechen terrorists had been busy over the 5 years they’d been in hiding. They’d acquired timers and detonators and some explosives. They were way short, though and with the DHS keeping a tight rein on explosives dealers and distributors, had a problem. There were all kinds of pictures on the web of that auditorium in Iowa and the leader had figured out that they needed at least double what they had if they were going to get that audience. Word had come from home that some more of his family had disappeared and frankly, he was in the frame of mind to do more than just blow up a concert. But, he was too far along in his planning to make a change. As it was, the distance between Detroit and Des Moines was ~600 miles and that was a lot of exposure.

Ames was about 30 miles north of Des Moines and Minneapolis was about 215 additional miles. He checked out the Iowa Highway Patrol, the state police agency. They had a little over 400 officers and 5 canines. That was a lot of territory for 400 people to cover and according the website, all 5 dogs were drug sniffers. He kept looking and found out that Iowa had quite a problem because of all the anhydrous ammonia the farmers used on their crops. It seemed that anhydrous ammonia could be used to produce methamphetamines. Dangerous stuff. More than one leak of the stuff had occurred in Iowa over the years, forcing towns to evacuate.

“Steve, we should put some old TV’s down in the cave,” Becky suggested.

“We’re going to feed, them, house them AND entertain them?” Steve responded. “I don’t know how I let you talk me into this whole thing in the first place.”

“If we ever get a lot of people in that cave all at one time, it’s going to be hard on them,” Becky pointed out. “They’re going to want to know what is going on above ground and the small kids will need to be entertained or they’ll drive everyone crazy. We have the dish, it shouldn’t be too much trouble to run a line down to the cave.”

“I had the cost of all of those receivers in mind, Beck,” Steve said.

“Have you been in the machine shed lately?” Becky asked.

“I don’t go in there much, you have it crammed with all of the junk you guys have been collecting at the garage sales,” Steve explained, “So no, I haven’t.”

“There are a lot of used TV’s out there, honey,” Becky explained. “They all work, too. What with the price of those flat screens coming down like they have, we managed to pick up quite an assortment of the older TV’s that people wanted to get rid of. And, we have 2 satellite receivers that are the same brand as the four we have in the house.”

“Do you have as many receivers as TV’s?” Steve asked.

“We’d only need the two, one for the communications shack and one to feed the other TV’s,” Becky replied.

“How are you going to manage to feed several TV’s with one receiver?” Steve asked.

“With a line amplifier,” Becky explained. “Both of the receivers are the older analog/digital models. We’ll just feed an analog signal through a line amplifier to all the TV’s. One of the HAM’s in Floyd told Barbara he’d hook it all up for us. We have some used DVD players and VHS tape players, too plus an assortment of old movies and cartoons and stuff.”

“Do what you think best, Beck,” Steve said, “And just leave me out of it.”

“I will and I have been,” Becky muttered under her breath.

Well, it had been a good idea at the time, but this Municipal Shelter was turning into quite the project. TV’s? Well hell, bring on the dancing girls! Having installed a system to capture the spring water, the cave was a whole lot dryer downstream from the spring. The Plumber had come up with some commercial sized hot water heaters from an apartment building fire and they even had hot water. Enough, in fact, that if the population didn’t get too high in the cave, people could shower every 2 or 3 days. That would make the place a lot more pleasant to live in.

The ambient temperature of a cave... Never mind, I explained that in another story, but

around Floyd, it's 48°. Put all those people in a cave and all of that body heat might warm it up to a tolerable level, though. Plus there was all of the heat from the kitchen. Niagara Cave is located in Harmony, MN, about 50 miles, as the crow flies northeast of Floyd. That cave in Minnesota was a whole lot older than those in the Floyd area because it had stalactites and stalagmites. You all knew that that region of Iowa was pretty well flattened by the last ice age, didn't you? Glacial till: accumulations of unsorted, stratified mixtures of clay, silt, sand, gravel, and boulders; the usual composition of a moraine. (Geology 101, ISU, 1966)

Some of the finest landforms of glacial origin to be seen in Iowa are found in the "lake district," in the northwestern part of the state. The clues to these past origins are everywhere – in the clusters of natural lakes and wetlands, in the boggy swales scattered among irregularly shaped hills, and in the boulders and gravels perched on sideslopes and hilltops. Though attention here is focused on Dickinson and Osceola counties as a showcase of glacial history, distinct terrain features resulting from the massive ice sheet extend throughout north-central Iowa. This region is called the "Des Moines Lobe," the area occupied by the last advance of glacial ice into the state. Its name refers to the location of Iowa's capital city at the southernmost limit of this former ice mass. It didn't quite make it to Floyd County.

In January 2009, the Chechen group departed from Michigan. They had 9 closed vans with 4 men per van. They were headed to Iowa, but not by any direct route because they still had a problem, the explosives or lack of explosives. Four years of research on the web had shown the group where they might find explosives around the Midwest and they needed time to check the places out. During the months of February and early March there were a rash of explosives thefts in the Ohio, Indiana and Illinois area. One explosive theft brought on a virtual army of ATF and FBI folks, so you can imagine what a rash of thefts triggered. I think they call them a taskforce. Having matured as an agency, DHS had become a typical bureaucracy. And, having an intelligence Czar hadn't helped. If you think we had problems leading up to 9/11/01, you ought to see what it was like now. Use your imagination.

As with any University town, Ames, IA was home to people from all over the world during the school year. (I wonder whatever happened to Habib? He was from Iran and his Daddy owned this small parcel of land and grew oil wells. That was in 1965.) It was easy enough for the terrorists to blend into the population in Ames. Since it was near the end of the 2nd quarter, apartments were also available. They told the landlords they were students at ISU, paid the 2-month deposit plus the first month's rent and moved in. The landlords should have been more observant; why would students be moving in during the middle of a quarter? They didn't care; they just wanted to rent the apartments.

Exposed elevated sites in southern Minnesota and northwestern Iowa are estimated to have class 4 wind power, although no data from 30 to 50 m (98 to 164 ft) above ground were identified in these areas and surface data are very limited. Data from the Rochester Airport, located on an exposed ridge in southeastern Minnesota, indicate class 4-wind power. Limited data from northwestern Iowa and southwestern Minnesota also in-

dicade class 4 power for exposed uplands. Class 3-wind power is estimated for exposed areas throughout the rest of Iowa, except for the extreme southeastern and southwestern parts of the state. Lower and more sheltered locations will have significantly less wind power, especially in winter and autumn when stable air in these lowlands restricts vertical mixing, causing wind speeds to be less than at higher locations. The farmstead wasn't an exposed area, in case you disagree with what I said about wind turbines. Rochester, about 90 miles from Charles City, is home to the Mayo Clinic. (Charles City was constructing a wind farm.)

"What do you think?" Becky asked.

"I think that it's cold down here," Steve replied.

"I won't be once it fills up with people," Becky said.

"Like that will ever happen, Beck," Steve shook his head.

"I meant, what do you think of the TV setup and all of that?" Becky explained. "Daddy thinks it was a good idea."

"Well, if Ralph said it was a good idea, what do you need my opinion for?" Steve asked.

"Because I want to know what you really think, you goose," Becky responded.

"I think that I was crazy to ever get involved in this whole Community Shelter business," Steve said. "The Press called me an eccentric Vet. I'll admit that we did the entire project pretty cheaply, all things being considered. But," he went on, "I can't believe that we'll ever need to use this cave as a shelter. We get along with Russia pretty good these days and the Cold War has been over for almost 20 years. We haven't heard a lot about terrorists these days either."

"There're China, North Korea and Iran," Becky pointed out. "There are those missing nukes from Iraq and the missing Russian nukes. There are also those Chechen terrorists that Daddy talks about all of the time."

"Ralph has nukes and terrorists on the mind, dear," Steve said. "What's the nearest target for a nuke, Omaha or Minneapolis, or perhaps Des Moines? They are all a long way from here. The most likely scenario would be for that anhydrous storage area (literary license) to start leaking ammonia. And, the prevailing winds would carry it to the east."

"Or a derailment," Becky said. "You seem to forget that you started the shelter in the first place."

"Yes I did and I was thinking of you and the kids," Steve said. "Our original group was Doc Thompson, mom, Jim and Barbara and their kids plus ourselves."

“Let’s quit arguing about the cave and go shooting,” Becky suggested.

“Suits me,” Steve replied.

It’s time to clear up another point about those M1A rifles they had. You may recall I said they were standard M1A’s. Mostly true, they were the Loaded standard models with the 22", 1 turn in 11 inches twist, right hand, six-groove national match air gauged medium weight barrels. Compare that to the Super Match barrel with the 22", 1 turn in 10 inches twist, right hand, Douglas Premium air-gauged custom heavy match barrel. I don’t know if that makes a difference or not in your thinking, but there you have it. Becky was flat out a better shooter than Steve. Steve could do 1 MOA out to 300-yards, but Becky was the sharpshooter and typically ran better groups than she had in high school, currently about ½ MOA. Maybe her rifle just had a better barrel, who knows. Lorraine shot just often enough to maintain a slightly over 1 MOA group at 100-yards, but she would rather spend time with the grandchildren. Ralph wasn’t much better; his eyes were starting to fail. Jim ran somewhere between Steve in Becky.

If there is an anhydrous ammonia storage area, there have to be rail lines. The rail line ran from Charles City to Mason City passing Floyd, Rudd and Nora Springs. It was the Iowa, Chicago & Eastern Railroad and there were stations in all of the towns/cities mentioned. Floyd was referred to as Floyd Crossing. Why is ammonia so important? It makes the crops grow for one thing and it’s dangerous as hell if it starts leaking for another. Some guys looking to make some meth got into one of those anhydrous tanks near Floyd in the early morning hours of the day of the concert in Ames. They got their anhydrous but left a valve open when one of them got burned. They ended up leaving their car parked on the tracks, for crying out loud. The Floyd County Sheriff was on scene because someone had reported smelling ammonia and the Deputies were in the process of removing the car from the tracks. Then, along comes a train from Charles City and points east hauling a load of anhydrous ammonia for Mason City and hits the car, causing a derailment. Things suddenly went from bad to worse. The railcars hit some of the ammonia storage tanks and not only ruptured themselves, but ruptured the storage tanks.

After the tornado hit Charles City in 1968 a lot of towns in the area put in tornado warning siren systems, including Floyd. The Floyd Town Council had decreed that the warning system should also be used in case of a serious problem at the anhydrous storage facility. *Catch-22. You have to be crazy to fly bombers, but you can’t fly bombers if you’re crazy.* Never saw that one. Anyway, you wanted to go to the basement if there was a tornado and evacuate if there was an anhydrous leak. Common sense, right?

On The Cheap – Chapter 11 – P.U.

Consider the Borden's Ice Cream Plant event, which occurred on December 11, 1983

First arriving firefighters at the Borden's Ice Cream plant at the edge of downtown Houston on December 11, 1983, barely escaped death or serious injury when the two-story plant blew apart from an anhydrous ammonia explosion. The explosion shattered a misconception that evolved over the years and changed procedures for handling ammonia releases.

It was early Sunday morning when the building engineer checked the refrigeration system that had been in a holding mode since production shut down Thursday. Only three of the 16 compressors in the basement were operating. The engineer proceeded to the other end of the basement when he heard a noise, turned quickly and saw a developing vapor cloud. He rushed up the rear stairs and closed the king valve on the liquid line, after which he escaped the building and notified the fire department.

When the first fire company arrived, the engineer offered to accompany the firefighters into the basement and point out a valve that may stop the leak. Firefighters loaned him some gear to wear and took a few minutes to instruct him in the use of self-contained breathing apparatus. This delay probably saved their lives, because the building blew apart as they headed for an entrance. The brick veneer walls collapsed onto the street a short distance from the firefighters.

A huge vapor cloud of ammonia poured from the building. Because it was Sunday, few businesses were open. The greatest threat was a downwind hotel, which was advised to shut the fresh air intakes on the air conditioning system. Firefighters set up heavy water streams to absorb much of the vapors. What vapors got through the defensive lines dissipated in time because ammonia vapors are lighter than air.

The Hazardous Materials Response Team arrived in the meantime. It was briefed by the engineer before attempting to enter the basement to assess the damage. Both stairways were blocked with debris, and the team had to descend via an elevator shaft. The trip proved fruitless. Many of the ammonia pipes were broken, and the basement was filling with water from the broken sprinkler pipes. It was decided to flood the basement, and firefighters laid in more hose lines. The vapor cloud diminished as water rose in the basement and began to cover the broken ammonia lines. The incident was concluded after the basement was completely full of water.

Several firefighters at the scene expressed astonishment that ammonia would burn. After all, ammonia carries a green, nonflammable gas label and rates only 1 (on a scale of 0 to 4 with four being the maximum flammability hazard) in the 704 classification of the National Fire Protection Assn. A notation in 704 states ammonia is classified 1 flammability because "ammonia is hard to burn."

The astonishment was not confined to the firefighters. An investigator of the incident,

who had 45 years experience with refrigeration, registered surprise. "It is hard to find any of the old, experienced ammonia refrigeration men who believe it possible for ammonia to explode," the investigator wrote in his report.

Borden's incident changed procedures of the Hazardous Materials Response Team for handling ammonia leaks. No longer would they rush into a building to plug a leak or broken ammonia line. A building would be thoroughly vented first. One usually learns from a tragedy. This time, it did not cost a life to learn a valuable lesson on the explosive potential of anhydrous ammonia.

Scary, these ammonia events, yes? Anhydrous ammonia is nitrogen, right? They got awfully lucky in Floyd because there was no explosion. What was in Floyd was most of the fire engines in that area. They couldn't bring them all, for fear of a fire breaking out somewhere else. The storage facility was on the south side of town and the residents ended up on the farm; it was good practice for when something serious happened. The authorities don't let you back into an area where there is an ammonia spill until it is safe and sometimes that takes a while.

Julie went down to the cave and got several urns/pots of coffee brewing for the crowd that was showing up at the farm. Then Barbara showed up with Jim and the kids and lent a hand. There were folding chairs in the machine shed that Steve hadn't gotten around to hauling to the cave so they started setting up chairs for people to sit on. It was chilly outside, but warmer than the cave so people just wrapped themselves in a blanket and drank the hot coffee, hot chocolate or, in a few cases, a cold beer. Steve had most of the blankets in the cave, but Jim and some others hauled them out for the folks. Someone took a quick head count and there were about 375 people sitting around. Steve ventured into the machine shed again and brought out some reflector lamps and extension cords and the lit up the area so the folks could see.

A couple of the doctors from Charles City arrived on the scene and they checked to make sure no one had gotten too big a sniff of the ammonia. A couple of seniors were complaining of breathing problems so they had them transported by ambulance to the hospital in Charles City. A Deputy came by the farm and advised that it might be as long as 15-18 hours before the people could return to Floyd. Becky heard that and asked Julie if she would mind putting on something for the folks to eat. Julie drafted some of the cooks from the restaurants in Floyd and they went to the cave to throw something together.

"I guess I shouldn't have complained about the cave," Steve remarked to Ralph, "This wasn't exactly what I had in mind, but we can help out these folks thanks to everything you got assembled down there."

"You know, Steve," Ralph replied, "It wasn't what I expected either, but we could just as easily end up dealing with an earthquake."

"Earthquake?" Steve scowled, "That's California."

“Ever heard of the New Madrid Fault?” Ralph asked.

“Sure, who hasn’t,” Steve grinned. “Still, Iowa hasn’t had an earthquake that I know of.”

“We have them all the time, Steve,” Ralph said, “But they rarely make the news. And they have tornados in California, on rare occasions, too. I know that you’re too young to remember it, hell, it happened before you were born, but back in 1954 Charles City got hit by a windstorm with 80-90 mph winds. I remember reading about it. You just never know when a natural or manmade disaster is going to strike.”

“Do you suppose they’ll still call me an eccentric in the Press?” Steve asked.

“Probably, but what do you care?” Ralph asked. “This is a good Christian deed you’re doing here helping these folks out. To hell with that 8-page rag that pretends to be a newspaper.”

Jim was pressed into service setting up some 8’ folding tables from the machine shed and a while later into hauling paper plates and plastic ‘silverware’ from the cave. A while later, Julie, Lorraine, Becky, Barbara and the cooks came dragging up pans filled with scrambled eggs, oven baked bacon and biscuits. They got some ladies from one of the churches to serve and returned to the cave to continue preparing breakfast. Julie’s homemade jellies were a big hit. The women returned to the cave to clean up the pots and pans and to start on lunch. They figured they would end up serving 3 meals that day. After they finished eating, some of the other women went down to the cave to see if they could lend a hand, but by that time, a bunch of the canned beef and vegetables were simmering in large pots. It looked to be beef stew for lunch.

Someone got in a car and drove to Charles City to pick up loaves of bread and tubs of margarine to go with the stew. By this time it was getting light and beginning to warm up. Still, it was a little chilly outside for a Saturday in May and most of the residents of Floyd stay wrapped up in their blankets. The gymnasium over in Charles City was opened up for the residents, but very few people left. By late morning it was much warmer and Becky had Steve pull a TV and VCR out of the machine shed and she put on cartoons for the kids. It was turning into an impromptu carnival-like atmosphere despite the problems in Floyd. Steve and Jim ended up giving many of the residents their very first tour of the Community Shelter.

Word came in early afternoon that the cleanup was going to take a little longer than initially anticipated. But, Julie had sort of figured on that and she had ground beef patties and hot dogs thawing and someone had gone back to Charles City for buns. Down in the cave, they prepared macaroni salad and potato salad and started to put together a picnic for the evening meal. It warmed up better than the weatherman had predicted and around 5pm they started serving up the hamburgers, hot dogs, baked beans and salads.

Several newspaper and TV stations showed up to cover the derailment and naturally migrated to the farm. No coverage of a disaster was complete unless you had coverage of those poor displaced folks who had been forced out of their homes. Man, were they disappointed. By the time they arrived and had the cameras set up and were ready to do interviews, the carnival-like atmosphere had taken over and everyone was have a good time waiting out the cleanup. It was reminiscent of the old saying, "When life gives you lemons, make lemonade." No one was hurt, no major property had been lost and the anhydrous supplier would no doubt have work for the people he employed. There was a rail siding where an anhydrous rail tanker could be parked so in all likelihood, this was just an inconvenience.

ISU had a little trouble with concertgoers showing up 'in their cups' as it were and they had guards posted to make certain that no drunks showed up to disrupt the concert. They even had 2 of the IHP drug-sniffing dogs on hand in case anyone showed up with drugs. What they should have had was that explosives sniffing dog that the US Marshal's had, but there hadn't been any threat. Hilton was open at certain times of the day and the terrorists had been able to plant their bombs without being noticed. The bombs used radio frequency detonators that could be triggered by a single transmission on the correct frequency. All of the explosives had been in place by May Day and all they needed to do was to make one more pass through Hilton and turn on the small receivers. They planned to be long gone from the area before the explosives were triggered.

All went as planned and they were northbound on I-35 near US 20 when WHO radio announced the explosion at Hilton Coliseum. The Iowa Homeland Security and Emergency Management was already dealing with that problem up in Zone 2, the derailment in Floyd. Ames was in District 1. Ken Mahler, the Coordinator of the Floyd County Emergency Management Agency in Charles City was in overall charge of the cleanup in Floyd. Lori Morrissey, Coordinator of the Story County Emergency Management Agency in Nevada soon found herself wishing all she had to deal with was some spilled anhydrous ammonia. The Governor immediately ordered the IHP to throw up roadblocks on I-35 and I-80. He also activated the Iowa National Guard. On north interstate-35, the roadblocks went up near Sheffield, south of Mason City and at the Minnesota state line.

After dinner, Ralph had gone inside to watch the news and had fallen asleep in a chair. He was awakened by the EAS tone on the TV. KIMT-TV in Mason City was announcing that an explosion had taken place at the Celine Dion Concert at Hilton Coliseum in Ames. And while they announced had no details, he indicated that the Iowa Highway Patrol had roadblocks setup and that the Governor had activated the ING. The Iowa threat level had been raised to red for the interim by the IHSEMD. The announcer went on to say that this was the second disaster in less than 18-hours and mentioned the derailment in Floyd. Ralph boiled out of the house like it was on fire and announced the explosion in Ames. He shared what little he knew and then went to talk to Steve.

"I may be over reacting, Steve, but that had to be a terrorist bombing in Ames. I think that we should get all of these people down in the Community Shelter."

Steve let out a sigh. "The last word was that it could be next morning until they get Floyd cleaned up and it is getting cold out," Steve summarized, "So I don't suppose it would hurt. Becky says that with all of the cooking they've been doing in the cave the temperature is up to almost 60° in the areas close to the main room. Get Jim and I'll make the announcement."

"Good thinking, Steve," Ralph said, "I had expected you'd give me more trouble."

"We have to get the people inside anyway, so why not now?" Steve replied. "Ladies and Gentlemen, can I please have your attention. It's starting to cool off quite a bit and you may all end up spending the night. I figured to move you down to the Shelter later, but in view of what Ralph has just said, I'd like to get everyone down below now. That way you will be warmer and can watch the news on TV."

There wasn't much grumbling. The people had already been through one shock with the derailment and most of the people were anxious to watch TV so they began to fold their chairs and haul them and their blankets into the living room and down the stairs into first the basement and then into the cave. Jim had gone ahead and put KIMT-TV on the master satellite tuner for the TV's and had the sets turned on. Julie and the others were brewing more coffee anyway and some of the folks helped out by bringing the leftovers down from outside. You could just about hear a pin drop while people struggled to hear what the TV announcer was saying.

At one time or another someone had suggested covering the large sinkhole to prevent the rain and snow from coming in. That made sense, but that grate was the vent for the cave. Jim had suggested that they cover the grate with a large awning. It wouldn't keep all of the water out, but it kept most out and still allowed the cave to 'breathe'. A large exhaust fan was mounted in that tunnel to pull the air out of the cave and a new duct had been installed to allow fresh air into the cave. No one had given any thought to a blast door or blast valve except Becky and Ralph, but they didn't really figure it was necessary, despite Becky's comment to Steve about China, North Korea, etc. That wooden door in the basement floor was made out of 2x6 lumber and it sealed the cave, but not tightly. Expecting the Russians to drop a nuke on Floyd? Not hardly.

On I-35, 6 vans proceeded northbound, each carrying 6 terrorists. Just south of Sheffield, they ran into the IHP roadblock. The first van skidded to a stop and the 6 men poured out and opened fire on the IHP officers with automatic weapons. The other 5 vans did a quick U-turn and headed south 6 miles to the previous exit. They had no idea where they were going after they got off the interstate because the leader was in the first van. At the 170 exit, they had a choice and could go east or west. They chose east and followed the blacktop until it turned north. By this time someone had an atlas out and they decided to turn east at the next blacktop and go through Aredale (pronounced Air Dale) to highway 14. Highway 14 would take them to Charles City. In Charles City, they could pick up highway 218 and take it to Austin, Minnesota. They didn't realize that highway 218 would take them through Floyd or hadn't heard about the ammonia spill. Whatever. The leader was in charge of planning and both he and his second in com-

mand were now laying dead on I-35. That was some pretty poor planning, if I may make an observation.

On The Cheap – Chapter 12 – Wrong Turn

Most of the law enforcement officials in the area were tied up on that anhydrous ammonia spill in Floyd. These are pretty rural counties in that area and the Sheriff's Departments are the principal source of law enforcement. Charles City has a small police force. They also have those mutual aid agreements and some of the cops from Charles City were over in Floyd helping with roadblocks.

Sold out, in this case, was 14,600 tickets. Dion was on tour and had an entourage with her. She had a problem with her attire and was late making it to the stage. (see notes) The Coliseum has 4 dressing rooms and she was still making last minute adjustments when the bombs detonated. Dion was safe in her dressing room. The crowd's chants suddenly became screams. Those Chechen fellas had an explosives problem and they hadn't made out as well stealing more as they had hoped. They mostly had high-order explosives, but Hilton is a big place. They had expected to kill thousands, but it was hundreds. The number of injuries was very high. The medical facilities and equipment in Ames and Des Moines were overwhelmed, no doubt causing a few more deaths.

The terrorists were moving unobserved across the rural Iowa landscape. Once on highway 14, they had 2 ways to get to highway 218, east through Charles City or north on the blacktop to highway 18 and then east to Floyd where they could pick up 218. They had the radio on in the lead van and were trying to get news of the explosion. They found a station broadcasting news of the explosion and near the end of the broadcast the commentator mentioned the disaster in Floyd. He also went on to say the highway 18, west of Floyd was still closed, but that highway 218 out of Charles City was now open. They turned the radio off before the announcer revealed that traffic was somewhat slowed by the roadblocks. When they got to 'seven mile corner' they followed the curve and drove the 7-miles east to Charles City. They picked up the bypass and took it to the 218 exit. So far, so good.

Down in the cave, e.g., Community Shelter, everyone was settled in by this time and glued to the TV's. The carnival-like atmosphere had evaporated, as the residents of Floyd watched the live feeds from Ames. The atmosphere had, in fact, become positively grim. Steve mentioned to Becky that they might just be the luckiest couple alive because she hadn't been able to get tickets for the concert. Ralph had a determination about him that no one had seen before. He got into those gun cases and began to pass out firearms and ammunition to Steve, Becky, Jim, Lorraine and a few of the men from Floyd. Anyone that Ralph was convinced could handle those military style firearms was armed.

"What do you think you're doing Ralph?" Steve asked.

"I'm arming those people here that can handle a gun," Ralph replied, the steel in his voice obvious. "We need to get a party topside in case those terrorists end up here."

"For crying out loud," Steve responded, "How likely is that? They last they were seen

was over on I-35 south of Sheffield.”

“It isn’t that far from there to here,” Ralph argued. “Let’s say that your right, Steve. What will it hurt?”

“You do what you want, honey,” Becky said, “I’m going with Daddy.”

“Aw what the hell,” Steve said, “Count me in. I think that you ought to leave Lorraine down here however, Ralph, just in case.”

“All right,” Ralph agreed, “I’ll find someone else to use her rifle, if I can.”

Ralph was very selective when he passed out those firearms. They only went to people who could demonstrate how the weapons worked without any instruction from him. Hyperdictionary defines manual of arms as, “a prescribed drill in handling a rifle.” For want of a better term, I’ll just call Ralph’s little test the manual of arms test. It took him a while, but he got the weapons and ammunition passed out, the people warmly dressed and ‘sitting guard’ near the road.

“I didn’t realize what a survivalist nut that Ralph is,” Steve commented to Jim.

“He’s harmless enough as long as you’re on his side,” Jim chuckled. “But what if he’s right? I don’t see the harm in it. Besides, if we really had a TSHTF scenario occur, this would be good practice.”

“Yesterday morning, I would have told you that everything that has happened today was impossible,” Steve observed. “It just goes to show you. What it shows you, I’m not sure, but it just goes to show you.”

“I don’t know either, Doc,” Jim responded, “But it has worked out pretty good having that Municipal Shelter. I can’t get over how well everything worked out. Now, I don’t think that those terrorists will show up here, but there’s probably a 50-50 chance that they could be in the area.”

“It would be just our bad luck that they ended up taking a wrong turn and showed up,” Steve said. “I think that Beck and I used up all of our good luck by not being able to get tickets for that concert. I didn’t realize that Barbara was that proficient with a M1A rifle.”

“I think that Becky has rubbed off on her,” Jim claimed. “She started pestering me and we came out to the range several times when you weren’t around. Becky knew about it, I’m surprised that she didn’t say something.”

“My wife never ceases to amaze me,” Steve replied. “Getting information out of her is like pulling teeth.”

“You two ought to quiet down,” Ralph counseled.

“Why, Ralph, I don’t see any headlights,” Steve said. “On the off chance that those terrorists just happen to pick this road out of all the roads in Iowa to come down, how do you propose to handle it?”

“Remember Bonnie and Clyde?” Ralph asked.

“Yeah, a couple of depression era gangsters,” Steve said, “Why?”

“Frank Hamer of the Texas Rangers was brought out of retirement to track them down,” Ralph explained. “Hamer tracked them for a while and then ambushed them in Louisiana. That’s what we’ll do if those five vans come down this road, ambush them.”

Ralph went on to describe the events that he’d seen on the History channel a dozen times over. Steve and Jim agreed with his logic, if nothing else, and some of the people were moved to the other side of the road. This produced a kill-zone that it would be hard for anyone to survive. They were armed with the M1A’s and those AK-47’s that Ralph dragged out. Some of the men must have been in Vietnam or in the Gulf war because they knew how to operate the AK’s.

Right about this time, the 5 vans were nearing Floyd on 218. They saw the roadblock, but there was a single Deputy stopping cars before letting them move on. They decided to chance it. The Deputy saw the 5 vans and immediately realized that these were probably the people that everyone was looking for. They were too close for him to even get on the radio without raising suspicion, so he played dumb. They pulled up to the roadblock and he glanced in the first van and motioned all 5 vans through. They had barely cleared the roadblock before he was on his radio telling anyone who’d listen that he’d just let the suspects through his roadblock.

All hell broke loose as Deputies and Troopers jumped in their cars to follow the vans. A trooper put out a broadcast immediately and a patrol car north of Floyd on 218 made an immediate U-turn and headed back towards Floyd, code 3. Just about 2 miles north of Floyd, the terrorists in the first van saw the lights of the oncoming patrol car. They decided to cut cross-country in an attempt to evade the police. As it happened, they turned west on the road that led to the farm.

“I got headlights and I hear sirens,” Ralph shouted excitedly on the CB handi talkie.

Ralph and Lorraine’s house was right at the end of the road where it turns north. Steve and Becky’s home was just a little to the east. In order to negotiate the turn, the vans would have to start to slow before they arrived at Steve and Becky’s farmhouse, putting the vans in a very compromising position. The folks locked and loaded and got ready to spring the ambush. You have to figure that there were about 12x40 7.62x39mm rounds ready to go plus another 100 rounds of 7.62.51mm rounds.

The 30 men in those 5 vans never had a chance. It would have probably made Frank

Hamer very proud. There were something like 97 holes, as I recall in Clyde's car back in 1934. The vans didn't make out much better. Most of those 580 rounds struck one of the targets. It was over in a minute or two with the terrorists having never gotten off a round. By the time the Floyd County Sheriff's Deputies and the Highway Patrol arrived on the scene, the people with the AK's had discreetly returned to the cave. Ralph had been very plain about not letting the LEO's see those firearms. Very plain, with a capital P.

The terrorists were dead. The LEO's had heard the gunfire and knew automatic weapons fire when they heard it. They weren't stupid and it was obvious that 5 people armed with M1A rifles couldn't possibly be responsible for the carnage that lay before them. Right about that time, the Sheriff, an elected official, skidded to a halt at the scene. A Deputy briefed him and he told the Deputy to pass the word to the other Deputies that they weren't going to look for the automatic weapons. The Deputy figured that the Sheriff had lost his mind, but did as he was told. The IHP officer's on scene were not political appointees or beholdng to anyone who was. They demanded that the automatic weapons be produced.

"Assuming we had automatic weapons, officer," Becky said, "They'd probably be down some rat hole somewhere. Now, maybe you'd like to go down to the Municipal Shelter and question all of those Floyd residents and ask them if they've seen any automatic weapons. Besides, who is to say that we didn't have a whole lot of those legal Chinese semi-automatic rifles?"

The trooper lived in Charles City. He decided that this one was over his pay grade and dropped the issue, for the moment. They had 30 bodies to bag, haul and identify. There were the vans to remove. There were statements to take. And the cleanup in Floyd wasn't coming along as fast as they had anticipated. And, he had no doubt that if they searched the Municipal Shelter, they'd play hell finding those automatic weapons. He knew what he'd heard and it would be in his report. It would be in everyone's reports and would be worded something like, "Heard what I assumed to be automatic weapons fire."

In fact, all of the troopers on the scene that night lived somewhere in that general area of Iowa. They were good law enforcement officers and they reported the incident accurately. They didn't over emphasize it in their reports, but they told it how it was. Maybe it was just the timing, who can say? They had the anhydrous event in Floyd, the explosion in Hilton Coliseum and a lot was going on for a small state like Iowa. They bumped the whole thing to the ATF to sort out. The federal law says that automatic weapons are only legal under federal law in states where they are permitted by state law. This was clearly a federal question.

I've tried, in my stories, to give you some insight into how the BATF is set up and how they operate. The division charged with enforcing firearms laws is also the division charged with dealing with explosives. The BATF might be a large agency, but it does not have unlimited manpower. Neither does the FBI and they aren't the people directly

charged with enforcing the NFA. The bottom line is that the AFT sent several people to Ames to investigate the Hilton Coliseum bombing. It's a big place, remember? By the time they'd gathered all of the evidence from the Coliseum, a few months later, they were tired and wanted to just go home. But, they had to investigate those automatic weapons up in Floyd County. So, they sent 4 agents to look for them. The agents interviewed everyone involved and they searched the cave. The branch from the closed off sinkhole into the main room and on to the river was very long and had thousands of hiding places. Then, there was the 2-mile-long branch back to the large sinkhole to check out. The four agents spent 2 days searching but they came up empty. Surprised? I'm not. The AK's were sitting right there in the main room the entire time, they just didn't look where they were stored. But, let me get back to that night, just after the terrorists were killed.

"That worked out well," Ralph said.

"Yeah right," Steve grouched. "We'll be ducking the feds for months to come." (Maybe I should have named this story *The Reluctant Survivalist*)

"Probably," Ralph said, "But they won't find anything and it will blow over."

"I've got to get back to the Shelter and help Julie in the kitchen," Becky said.

"That's my girl," Ralph said and Steve just stood there mouth agape.

Then, someone said that one of the sows was farrowing and Steve handed his rifle to Ralph and headed for the hog house. That was the end of the discussion. The cleanup was completed the next day and the residents of Floyd returned to their homes. At the next Town Council meeting, the Council voted for \$500 to replace the supplies that had been consumed and issued a certificate of appreciation to Drs. Stephen and Rebecca Cooper. This would be a good place to end the story, but it was far from over, so I guess that I'd better tell, 'the rest of the story'.

The final death count at Hilton Coliseum was over 1,000. It wasn't the WTC, but for Iowa it might as well have been. The population of New York City is about 3 times the population of the entire state of Iowa, so proportionally the death toll was about the same. Probably the highest death toll for any single previous event in Iowa was the crash of that DC-10 at the Sioux City airport back on July 19, 1989.

Iowa has experienced 18 major disaster events since 1989, 16 have resulted in a Presidential declaration of major disaster. Not included under a Presidential disaster declaration, but yet a defining incident for the Homeland Security and Emergency Management Division was the crash of United Airlines flight 232 in Sioux City on July 19, 1989. There were 112 fatalities resulting from the crash and 184 survivors. Also, not included is the Terra Chemical plant explosion near Sergeant Bluff, Iowa that resulted in the death of 4 employees and injury to 18 employees and one emergency worker. At the time of the event, the Terra Chemical Plant explosion resulted in the nation's largest chemical re-

lease. Over 1,600 tons of liquid ammonia-nitrate was released into open-air containment ponds. Not a bad guess on my part, huh?

Never underestimate that danger of things like anhydrous ammonia spills or of terrorists for that matter. What would have happened to Floyd if that anhydrous had exploded instead of leaking? It might have wiped the little town off the map. As far as the events of that day went, Saturday, May 23, 2009 would be a date that they would remember for a very long time.

"I replenished the Shelter with the money the Town Council voted," Ralph announced.

"What about those AK's?" Steve asked.

"Hiding in plain view," Ralph replied.

"I'm sure glad you had the sense to collect those suppressors, Ralph," Steve said. "In the heat of the moment, I'd completely forgotten about them."

"I guess that I'm good for something," Ralph chuckled. "It might not be a bad idea to get some of those town folks trained up on the AK's for the next time. I tagged the suppressors showing which rifle they came from."

"Next time?" Steve fairly shouted. "I've had enough excitement to last me 2 lifetimes already."

"That guy out in California usually has several events to deal with in those stories of his," Becky pointed out. "Daddy could be right, you know. It might be just a matter of time before the other shoe drops."

"Aw Beck," Steve said, "We had the anhydrous leak and the terrorists turned up on our front door step, what are the odds of our having to deal with any more global events?"

"Probably slim and none, honey," Becky agreed, "But how much trouble would it be for us to maintain the state of preparations we have? I'm sure that the Town Council could be persuaded to appropriate a little money each year to maintain things that we would need like flashlight batteries, new canning lids and the like."

"Well, I was proven wrong not once, but twice in the same day," Steve admitted. "If you want to go to the trouble, I guess we can pay for the gas to can all of the food."

On The Cheap – Chapter 13 – The Letters

Dear Bob,

I've been following the events back in Iowa in the Charles City Press and the Des Moines Register. That was quite the tragedy at Hilton Coliseum. I tried to tell you that you folks back in Iowa weren't exempt from terrorists. Unfortunately, I was right, but I wish I hadn't been.

Those people up in Floyd seem to have their act together pretty darned good if you ask me, which you didn't. It's a shame that one of them isn't an MD, but I guess you can't have everything. I think it was good of you to give them your old HAM equipment. They may end up needing it someday.

You wouldn't have thought that a little town like Floyd would have had 2 events of that magnitude happened in a lifetime, let alone a single day. It just goes to show you that you can never anticipate stuff happening. All you can do is prepare for the worst and hope for the best. You probably haven't read any of the fiction I've written, but that's ok. I suppose that you'd have to say that I'm a survivalist in name only. We can never seem to get far enough ahead so that I can even buy a rifle. Wouldn't make much difference anyway.

If you'd have asked me back in 2004 when I was having all of the health problems, I'd have told you I'd be lucky to make it to 62. I was 66 on my last birthday, go figure. I know that we'll be coming up on our 50-year high school reunion in 2011, but don't look for me to show up. It isn't that I don't want to come and see you and Herb; it's just that it probably isn't in the cards financially.

Keep your powder dry,

*Gary
KD6GDQ*

◦

Dear Gary,

As a matter of fact, I did read one of your stories. Boy, you had a regular money printing press going there. heh-heh. Maybe it's that way in California, but it sure isn't that way in Iowa. What's with you and all of the guns in your stories?

You might try getting in touch with the people who gave you your HAM exams, they might have records and you could go ahead and get your extra class license. It's not like the old days when you had to do 20wpm to get it. It just doesn't seem to mean as much. Times change I guess.

Those folks up in Floyd probably just got lucky. I heard that the wife's father and the wife were the real survivalists, and that that Vet was a reluctant survivalist. Word was that someone had a bunch of automatic weapons and that's how they stopped those terrorists. But, nobody got arrested, so who knows?

I probably won't go to the 50-year reunion either, so don't worry about it. I haven't seen Herb Laube in a long time, where is he, Minneapolis? I guess I should have made it to the 20-year reunion, that's the only one you showed up for, right?

Happy Spelunking,

Bob

◦

Dear Drs. Cooper,

You don't know me. My name is Gary Ott and I'm that friend of Bob Wahlstrom who used to explore those caves with him. You may or may not know that at one time I wrote a little Survivalist Fiction. I think some of my old stories are still posted at the Frugal Squirrel website, but I'm not really sure.

I have been following events back in Iowa online with the Press and the Register. I would just like to tell you how much I admire what the two of you did with that cave. If someone out here in California had a cave like that, they'd probably have armed guards just to keep everyone out. Bravo!

I understand that Mrs. Cooper's father was also involved in those events. You tell him Good-O for me. Is he a Vietnam Vet? That might explain some of his thinking, or maybe not. The United States sure has changed over the years. That being said, it's still the same in a lot of ways. It surely warmed my heart that you did what you did, but I guess that I'm repeating myself. You seem to be pretty well prepared and I would counsel that it wouldn't take so much for you to stay prepared. You might even be able to turn it into a community project, but what do I know?

Sincerely,

*Gary Ott
KD6GDQ*

◦

Dear Mr. Ott,

We intend to keep the Municipal Shelter going for as long as possible, and we appreciate your kind words.

My father, Ralph, was in Vietnam, how did you know? It's really a chore growing and canning all of those vegetables and keeping the shelter up to par, but since I no longer teach at NIACC, my mother-in-law, my mother and I manage. We take the older canned vegetables and meat and Daddy distributes them to the needy to keep our inventory fresh. We might just talk to a church group or someone in Floyd about helping out, thanks for the suggestion.

Wasn't it just awful about those terrorists blowing up Hilton Coliseum? At my Daddy's suggestion, we were armed and waiting for them. We were pretty well armed, but I really can't go into that. We caught them in a crossfire and it was just like Frank Hamer taking out Bonnie and Clyde, according to Daddy.

About your fiction. I've read some of your stories, but my husband has not. Your grammar is fair and spelling not too bad. You must have written them using Microsoft Word. At least in your stories, you covered a lot of possibilities. I simply can't imagine what it must be like living in California. Is it really as bad as you portray in your stories?

Thank you for your letter,

*Dr. Becky Cooper
KR0DUZ*

o

“Steve, we got a letter from that friend of the guy in C.R.,” Becky said, “You know, the older Ott boy.”

“Really? What did he have to say?” Steve asked.

“Not much, really,” Becky replied. “He congratulated us on helping out the folks in Floyd and suggested that we keep the shelter going. He said that we might try turning it into a community project. He also said that we should stay prepared.”

“Beck, I've been thinking about this,” Steve said. “I don't really have any objection to you, mom and Lorraine growing and canning vegetables. We will get a nice tax write-off according to Clem on the food that Ralph gives away. But even if we didn't, I don't think that I would mind. It was nice being able to handle anything that life threw our way. Now, I don't believe that we'll ever need to use that shelter again, but it won't require much of an investment to keep it going, so you have my full support.”

Obviously Becky didn't need Steve's permission, but it was nice to have his support. They decided to move the canning operation down to the cave for several reasons. In the first place, there were more burners and they could can more jars of goods at the same time. In the second place, it just meant less distance to move the jars once they cooled. In the third place, the farmer who owned the land across the road told them that

he would donate 3 acres to their garden, effectively doubling its size. What was 3 acres more or less to a farmer? Maybe 300 bushels of corn? It wasn't significant and since the produce would end up in the Community Shelter, he'd take a shot at writing the rental value off on his taxes as a charitable donation, Clem would know.

With that much garden to tend and harvest this coming year, the girls had to get busy. They needed more jars and more pressure cookers. They had 4 extra cookers in the machine shed, but they could use at least 8 more. Lids weren't the problem, one just bought them, and the rings could be recycled. Becky succeeded in getting the Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts in the area to run a 'Jar Drive', collecting jars and rings. Man was that ever successful. People didn't seem to care like they used to and not only did they end up with several thousand jars and rings, they got 22 pressure cookers, almost more than they could use. People must have been cleaning out their garages and you could count on everyone taking a charitable deduction for what they gave away.

They also persuaded some ladies from a church group to help out. These were the same ladies who had helped when there had been that anhydrous problem. They had a total of 30 pressure cookers now. Think about it, 210 jars at a crack! It would allow them to keep a continuous production going, even if the ladies from the church group didn't show up to help. Most of the work associated with canning is in tending the gardens, picking and preparation. The canning part is the easy part if you have enough canners and burners. It was going to work out just fine with all of those ladies to snap green beans, husk, silk and cut the corn off the cob, etc. Becky and Barbara got everything organized right after Christmas, 2009. (Sorry to skip around here, but bear with me.)

During the summer of 2009, while they were tending the gardens and canning, Ralph was busy distributing the prior year's goods to the needy. Needy, maybe, but proud. They had all sorts of empty jars to give back to Ralph and he ended up with more empty jars than he had started with full jars. By golly, that had worked out better than anyone had anticipated. It was a pure shame they hadn't had those extra 3 acres to plant in 2009. But, it wasn't until later, when she got the letter from California, that Becky put those plans into motion. The ATF had already been there by that time and left empty handed.

When Christmas rolled around in 2009, there were plenty of presents under the tree. The gifts from Ralph were the most impressive. Those gifts were fondled, appreciated and then cleaned and put with the AK's in the main room of the cave. (See note.) Jennifer was now 5 years old and sometimes you could understand what she was trying to say. Little Steve was jabbering a mile a minute, but he didn't make much sense. Jennifer had missed the age cutoff for Kindergarten and would be just shy of 6 when she started school in 2010.

Steve had a pretty good year and figured that Becky should have a rifle commensurate with her skill level, a Super Match M1A with the optional barrel, Surefire suppressor and light and another of those scopes. Becky must have thought exactly the same way, but

there was a story in that. Steve had been forced to under buy. Becky really should have had a Remington M24 or a SA M25 White Feather. Becky, by contrast, had overbought and Steve ended up with the same gun, similarly equipped. Ralph had purchased both rifles for them, so maybe that explains what happened. Anyone care to guess what Barbara received for Christmas? Does a Loaded Standard M1A ring a bell? Ralph had picked that up, too.

“This is a strange flash hider,” Steve commented, “What’s that all about Ralph?”

“That’s the FA mount for the FA762S,” Ralph said.

“What’s that, an accessory?” Steve asked.

“You could say that,” Ralph intoned.

“A FA762S is the suppressor you have on your other rifle,” Becky explained. “Daddy, you shouldn’t have.”

“I know, but they make better flash hidere,” Ralph replied.

“There was a time when I would have launched into a tirade about turning this farm into an armed camp,” Steve said, “But, after what happened this past spring, all I can think of to say is thanks.”

“I just hope that you never have to use that weapon for the purpose it was designed for,” Ralph replied. “I’ll tell you kids’ one thing, this is really a different place than the country I grew up in. I was 19 when I landed in Vietnam in ’66. When I came home, it was like coming home to a different country. I got spat on, just because I was in uniform.”

“You must be pretty close to the same age as that guy out in Palmdale,” Becky said.

“I graduated in 1964,” Ralph said, “When did he graduate?”

“I think in 1961 Daddy,” Becky said.

“Close to the same age, yes,” Ralph said, “He’s about 3 years older than I am. He probably saw it all happen too.”

“I got a letter from him, you know,” Becky said. “He was mighty complimentary about you. I can only surmise that that guy in Cedar Rapids must have written him. He guessed that you were a Vietnam vet.”

“Huh. Did I hear someone say that he was into Survivalist Fiction?” Ralph asked.

“I might have mentioned it Daddy,” Becky said. “I’ve read several of his stories. Fair writer, maybe. But, when he was cranking them out, he must have been going a mile a minute.”

“Maybe I’ll go read some of those stories and see how we compare to what he wrote,” Ralph commented.

“Daddy, I have the feeling that we’re ahead of the curve,” Becky said.

Author’s Note:

You see it didn’t really matter who won the 2004 election, because this was 2009 and the Democrats had the White House and Congress back. And that AWB? It was back in with a vengeance. So it doesn’t make much sense to tell you about what Ralph had found and/or acquired. Suffice it to say that that stuff missing from SE Asia and the Gulf now had a new home, somewhere. Let’s face it folks, when the Democrats/Liberals get a majority in Congress and have the White House, we can kiss the 2nd Amendment goodbye. What do some people say? “When guns are outlawed, only outlaws will have guns!”

I was going to tell you what else Ralph ended up with, but... Now, if you’re guessing some M16A1s, you’ve been reading my notes. The only real advantage a 5.56 has over a M1A is the rate of fire. I don’t much care for them, but I wouldn’t kick one out of bed for eating crackers or smelling of gun oil. Especially not an M16A3 and a passel of 30 round, Teflon coated magazines. Like someone said, they beat the hell out of rocks or something like that. And, toss in a few cases of Lake City overproduction and I’d get really happy.

Frankly, I surprised that the LEO’s and ATF didn’t look harder for those automatic weapons. Then there was that phone call I got back in 2004 from my son. Derek asked did I hear about what John Kerry was going to do? I said no, now what? He said that if Kerry was elected, he intended to increase the military by 2 full divisions and then send those 2 Divisions to Iraq for 6 months. He wanted to know how realistic I thought that was. I didn’t beat around the Bush. I told him that putting 2 more Divisions on board would take 3-4 years. Then, I said there was all of their equipment. He said, they didn’t need any equipment, Kerry had voted against every equipment appropriation since whenever. I don’t get into politics, I just vote Republican and let the chips fall where they may.

On The Cheap – Chapter 14 – When, Not If

You know what the title of this chapter is all about, right? That's the question that was on the mind of every gun owning American. With the swing in the country from moderate or conservative to Liberal, the loss of the 2nd Amendment was only a matter of when, not if. And, the when had to do with when the Democrat party got a hold of the White House and Congress. After that, unless the Republicans could pull a rabbit out of the hat, the House and Senate would reinstate the Assault Weapons Ban and this time without the sunset clause. And, from the looks of some of the legislation that had been introduced after the 2000 election, the new ban would make the previous ban look like it actually supported the 2nd Amendment. That is a very grim reality.

Fortunately, people like Ralph weren't bothered by something as stupid as the AWB. To hell with the amnesty period. They wouldn't pay you what the guns were worth, the guns would be permanently destroyed and then you were up The Creek. Ralph went just the other way. He started loading up on the illegal stuff like automatic weapons and suppressors. It was eating into his savings at an alarming rate, but you couldn't spend the money if you were dead and in his mind, not having firearms added up to being dead.

Another thing kept Ralph going, H&K had brought out the HK416 and HK417 with various barrels. They were 5.56 and 7.62 respectively and were semi-auto, full-auto. They were available to select groups, military and law enforcement. But then, so were Sure-fire suppressors, in Iowa. Without going into details, Ralph acquired 12 of each with either 4 or 3 barrels and a large supply of magazines. They already had a large supply of 5.56 and 7.62 ammo and he deferred that purchase, for the moment.

The US had not been invaded since the war of 1812. Why not? Would you invade a country where the majority of the population was armed to the teeth? Maybe a shotgun wasn't an 'approved' military weapon, but they'd make you just as dead. Technically a shotgun violated the Geneva Convention. That's why they were officially only used by Military Police. A good hunting rifle was probably the equal to many of the earlier sniper rifles. The term sniper originated back when the US was very young. Those Americans didn't fight fair; they fired long-range shots from guns with rifled barrels, thus the term rifle. And their tactics were reminiscent of a snipe hunt, thus the term sniper. (Might have that wrong, but I covered it in a previous story. Plus, I forgot Pancho Villa.)

What did a liberal like Teddy Kennedy care about the public's right to keep and bear arms anyway? He could hire Uzi equipped security guards with those dirty millions old Joe had made running rum during the Prohibition Era. No sir, disarm the American public and you are just asking to be invaded. It might be by the UN using Peacekeepers, but whatever the guise... disarm the public and you could kiss America goodbye. Maybe that's what all of the liberal Democrats wanted. At least that's what Ralph believed.

It didn't really surprise Becky when Ralph started coming up with weapons that were highly illegal. How the M1A had missed not being included in the new AWB was anybody's guess. Probably the only thing that saved it was the inability of the Congress to

agree on banning semi-automatic weapons. And, the M1A looked like a rifle rather than like an assault weapon. That was what a lot of this assault weapons controversy was about, wasn't it? What a weapon looked like. Take a person proficient with a pump shotgun and put him or her in a situation where they were in a close up fight, for example. With the adrenalin pumping and reasonable skills, the person could fire a shot every time the weapon came to bear, emptying that tubular magazine in the blink of an eye with very deadly results.

It was Valentine's Day 2010 and Jim and Barbara had come by after dinner to visit.

"Jim, if you'd have told me a year ago that I'd ever have a second main battle rifle or an assault rifle, I would have tried to get you committed," Steve commented shaking his head.

"Times change Doc," Jim responded, "Even in Iowa. This thing with the meth has gotten so far out of proportion that there must be labs in every nook and cranny."

"When did everything start to go so wrong?" Steve asked rhetorically.

"Probably about 5 minutes after the last state ratified the Constitution," Jim chuckled.

"Maybe, but you know what I mean, Jim," Steve continued.

"Unfortunately, I do," Jim admitted. "I'm no student of history, Doc, but I'd say that it started to really go bad after the Second World War. All of those GI's came home hoping for a chicken in every pot and the government gave it to them. There was the GI housing and all of that. That one old housing tract over in Charles City is nothing but GI homes."

"Which one is that?" Steve asked.

"The Salisbury addition," Jim replied. "That Korean war wasn't all that popular because of the way it was handled. Then we got ourselves into Vietnam. I don't have to tell you what that did to the country; I'm sure that Ralph has said more than you wanted to hear on the subject. All the time, the country was changing and not for the better. When we were young, Reagan broke the Soviet Union because they couldn't keep up with the US's spending. After that, Bush got us in the first Gulf War and it looked like the US had redeemed itself, at least in a military sense. But Bush then declared a *Peace Dividend* and stripped the military. He shouldn't have done that, but, I suppose that hindsight is 20/20. Then, Dubya maybe overreacted to the WTC disaster and got us into that war in Iraq. I'm not saying he was wrong, but it could have been handled better."

"Dang Jim," Steve said, "Do you moonlight for the History channel?"

"No Doc, but I watch it," Jim chuckled. "There's that old saying that people who forget history are doomed to repeat it. Of course at this point in our history, the country was

already starting to slide downhill. The attitudes had changed and there were so many people with a liberal point of view. In a way, the status of the country is reflected in the status of the 2nd Amendment. Here in Iowa people didn't get all that upset about not having sawed off shotguns and tommy guns because they didn't see the need for them. Hell, every farmer had a shotgun and that was good enough for them."

"I never thought I'd end up breaking the law," Steve said, "On the other hand, I guess if the government can't carry out its mandate to protect the people of this country, we're just going to have to do it ourselves."

"I take it that you watch the History channel, too," Jim chuckled again.

"I watch all of the educational channels, Jim," Steve said. "Most of the programming on TV stinks. It's either cop shows or sitcoms and the cop show cycle is off again."

"Me too," Jim added. "Of course, I can't say that it's any better at times. One week Discovery channel has the Earth being smashed by a meteor and the next week Mt. St. Helens blows up for the 400th time. I am pretty sure by now that the allies won WW II."

"Not to change the subject from TV," Steve started, "But old Ralph has quite the program going training volunteers from Floyd for a TSHTF or a TEOTWAWKI situation."

"I understand TSHTF," Jim responded, "But what's this TEOTWAWKI deal?"

"It means The End Of The World As We Know It, Jim." Steve explained.

"You mean like a meteor strike or a new Ice Age or something?" Jim asked.

"That, and more," Steve said. "It could be a nuclear attack that wipes out the country or even an invasion where our way of life was wiped out."

"Bite your tongue, Steve," Jim cautioned, "That's too horrible to even imagine."

"So were over 1,000 people dying at the Hilton Coliseum," Steve retorted, "But it happened."

"What are you two visiting about?" Becky asked walking into the den and handing them coffee.

"The end of the world, honey," Steve explained.

"You've been around Daddy too much, Steve," Becky laughed, "I do believe that he's starting to rub off on you."

"I don't know about that Becky," Jim defended Steve, "The way that they got the military reorganized now I'm not so sure this country is safe any longer."

“That must explain why you bought those assault rifles, Jim,” Barbara said entering the den.

“Well, Ralph does have a point,” Jim replied. “Of course that put me, us, in the same boat as Steve and Becky.”

“There aren’t enough prisons in the US to hold all of the people who are breaking the law since that new AWB went into effect,” Becky suggested.

“One of these days,” Jim suggested, “The people are going to revolt and try and take the country back.”

“I sure hope not,” Steve responded, “If that were to happen, it would be a perfect excuse for the UN to send in Peacekeepers, and then where would we be? The UN has been looking for an excuse for years.”

Maybe not your typical conversation, it sounded more like The Three Amigos out in California, but conversations similar to this were occurring all over the country in 2010. Terrorists had struck again, this time in the Heartland of the country. (Hilton) I suppose to an outsider, it would seem pretty incongruous. You had an educator, a couple of Vet’s, a contractor, a grocer, a health department worker, a cafeteria manager and a homemaker all acting like they were the Minutemen. Then, you had the Town Council supporting their foolishness and the Ladies Auxiliary at the Church having committed to helping them this coming summer. And, to top it off, this was taking place in east north central I-O-W-A. Go figure.

Via e-mail

Dear TOM,

I’ll call you TOM because that’s the name you used when you wrote all of those preparedness stories. I go by R2D4/C5PO on the forum, but my name is Ralph. You wrote my daughter, Rebecca, a while back. Thanks for the compliment, but I was just doing what came naturally.

Anyway, the reason I’m writing is because I’ve read your stories. You sure do have a gloomy outlook on life, but given the state the country is in today, I can understand it. Becky said she told you I was in ‘Nam. Did you go, too? I’m about 3 years younger than you, so maybe you missed it. At least that’s the impression I get from your stories.

We’re pretty well prepared here in Floyd. We have that cave of yours fitted out like one of those shelters in your stories. Did you ever think of moving back to Iowa? You would sure be welcome here in Floyd. I’m getting old and I have a heart problem, don’t mention that to Becky if you write her again. I sort of figured that you and your friends, what do you call them-The Three Amigos-would fit right in here. I’ll tell you, I don’t know

which way this country is headed, but it sure doesn't look good to me.

Did I understand right that when the new AWB went into effect that California outlawed semi-automatic firearms? No wonder they call it the land of fruits and nuts. I just wanted to let you know that if you ever decide to come back to Iowa, you should look me up.

*Ralph
Becky's dad*

Via e-mail

Ralph,

Appreciate the invitation. I don't know if Ron and Clarence would like northern Iowa, but I'm really thinking about moving back. My wife keeps saying that I couldn't handle the weather back there, but I think maybe I could. We live in the desert and you can always put on more clothes, but there's a limit to how many you can take off.

I'm going to try and talk some sense into Sharon one more time. If not, maybe I'll just come by myself. You don't happen to have any decrepit old bimbos there around Floyd, do you? I've done things backwards most of my life. Most Iowans would be moving to Arizona or somewhere warm, but it just makes sense to me to move back to the cold. Hell, if you know one of your neighbor's names here in Kalifornia, you're above average.

I'll let you know how my talking to Sharon works out. But, don't be too surprised if I show up on your doorstep. I've got a gut feeling that the stuff is about to hit the fan. About all you can own for guns in Kalifornia anymore is a single shot shotgun or rifle.

*Gary aka TOM
KD6GDQ*

On The Cheap – Chapter 15 – I'll Go Without You

"Sharon, Let's sell this dang house and move back to Iowa," Gary said.

"We could never stand the cold back there, dear," Sharon replied.

"Bull. I've been listening to that excuse for 10 years or more," Gary snapped. "I'm going. Now, either you sell the house and come along or I'll go without you."

"Go where?" Sharon asked.

"Floyd. It's a small town 5 miles west of Charles City on 218," Gary said.

"Isn't that the place where they had that ammonia spill last spring?" Sharon asked.

"So, you do watch the news once in a while," Gary replied, "I was beginning to wonder."

"I guess we can't keep bailing the kids out all of the time," Sharon said. "Amy is 32 and a college graduate and getting along just fine on her own. Ok, I'll list the house. We should get a fortune for it, what will a house cost us back in Iowa?"

"I'll go on the net and check," Gary said. "Actually, I have no idea. Time was when you could get an old farmhouse for \$20,000 with a little land. I expect we'll get enough to buy an old home in Floyd."

"With stairs?" Sharon asked. "How are you going to get up and down?"

"We'll just put a bedroom on the main floor so we won't have to go up and down," Gary suggested.

"I just hope that you know what you're getting us into," Sharon replied, unconvinced.

Via e-mail

Dear Ralph,

You could have knocked me over with a feather, but she agreed. Are there any old homes for sale in Floyd? Let me know.

Regards,

TOM

Via e-mail

Dear TOM,

I'm afraid not in town, no. That farmhouse over on the highway is sitting empty. You know, the farm where that Jesse James cave is. It's only a couple of miles from our place. I'll check, but I'd bet that you could get it for a song.

Sincerely,

Ralph

PS. It will be nice to meet you in person.

Via e-mail

Ralph,

Don't be so sure until you meet me.

TOM

Gary got on the phone and called a realtor in Charles City. The old farmhouse was available all right, but they wanted \$100,000. Sharon had listed their home for \$300,000 and the realtor in Palmdale said that at that price, it would go in a week. So, Gary told the realtor in Charles City that he'd pay the \$100,000, subject to their home selling. The realtor told Gary that he'd fax him the papers if he had a fax and they could sign the offer and fax it back. Iowa now accepted faxed documents provided there were originals to back them up. Gary gave the guy his fax number and sat back to wait for the fax. While he was waiting, he gave Ronald McDonald a call.

"Guess what partner, I'm sitting here waiting for a fax from Iowa," Gary said. "When I get it, Sharon and I are going to sign it and fax it back. We're making an offer on an old farmhouse north of Floyd."

"Where do I know the name Floyd from?" Ron asked.

"It's that little town about 5 miles west of Charles City where they had that train wreck and the anhydrous leak last May," Gary explained.

"What can I say?" Ron replied. "It's been good to know you, but I think that Lyn and I are going to move to New México to be with Robert. Have you talked to Clarence lately?"

"Not since they moved to Alabama, no," Gary replied.

"Just wondering," Ron said. "Say I have a going away present for you, can I bring it over?"

"Any time, partner."

It wasn't 10 minutes before Ron pulled up. He got out of the car and pulled two hard shell gun cases out of the trunk.

"Probably wants to brag about some new guns," Gary thought as he watched Ron from his office window.

Ron let himself in, spoke to Sharon and walked down the hall to the office. Sharon was right behind him with a cup of coffee and the bottle of Sweet and Low.

"Let me know what you think of this," Ron said, setting one case on the floor and opening the other.

"Jeez, where did you get that?" Gary asked his mouth flying open and his eyes bugging out at the M1A rifle.

"Over in New Mexico a while back," Ron replied.

"Tell me about it, Ron," Gary said, "Pleaseeeeeee."

"That is a M1A Super Match with the Marine Corps camo stock," Ron began. "That doo-hickey on the front is the quick detach mount for the Surefire Suppressor there in that slot. There're 11 of the genuine SA 20-round magazines for the rifle plus 1 10-round and 1 5-round for hunting. The scope is the Leupold Mk IV, variable."

"That SOB is so illegal here in Kalifornia, you're going to go to jail for a long time, partner," Gary said.

"Maybe. Maybe not," Ron replied. "Check this out," he said closing the case and setting it on the floor before lifting and opening the second case.

The second case contained a rifle that Gary had only ever seen pictures of. The left side of the weapon was facing up in the case and he could see the selector switch.

"Where did you get an M16A3?" Gary asked. "I recognize that mount on the barrel, it looks like a Fast Attach mount for the M4-FA Suppressor and that Suppressor looks just like the pictures in that old gun magazine I have."

"Don't ask," Ron said. "What do you think of it?"

"I'm flabbergasted," Gary replied. "I never figure you for the type of guy who has 2 illegal firearms. To be perfectly honest, partner, I'd all but kill to own those 2 rifles."

"Good, because they're your going away present," Ron laughed.

"Bull," Gary replied. "I know we go way back, but those guns must be worth several

thousand dollars, not to mention they're illegal as hell."

"In the first place," Ron said, "When I bought them, they hadn't passed the AWB again. In the second place, I have another pair just like them. In the third place, didn't anyone ever teach you to just say thanks and shut up?"

"Uh, thanks, partner," Gary said. "But how..."

"When Linda's Dad died, she gave me some of the money and I went on a shopping spree," Ron explained. "Don't worry about them; they're off the books completely. And aside from my maintaining them, they've never even been fired that I know of."

The fax came; Gary and Sharon signed it and faxed it back. Two days later their home sold for the asking price. A month later the escrow closed on the home and they transferred \$100,000 to the Realtor in Iowa's bank account after calling and getting the information. A few days later the movers showed up and packed and loaded everything they had. Gary went to the backyard, stood over the graves of all of the pets that were buried there and said goodbye one final time. He actually had a pretty good cry thinking of all of their animals who had died and were buried there. Missy was pushing 12 years old, but was still alive and would accompany them back to Iowa together with their remaining cats. Unlike Kalifornia, Iowa didn't search every car with an out-of-state license plate, so they shouldn't have any problems with the pets. Besides, they'd taken them to High Desert Vet Clinic and they had all of their shots.

Derek had flown to Kalifornia and taken the Shuttle to Palmdale. He was going to drive them back. They each had a suitcase and a bugout bag plus those locked gun cases. Gary made sure that Derek buried the cases deep in the trunk of the old Skylark. Derek thought that odd, but his Dad gave him a "Don't ask" look and he didn't. But, he did assume that whatever was in those cases was probably pretty illegal. Driving across country with 2 seniors, a dog and 2 cats was an adventure for which Derek was unprepared. Fortunately, Missy, Sassy and Taffy all curled up into balls and slept together most of the way. They had a litter pan for the 2 cats and every time Missy woke up they stopped and let her out until she took care of business. It took them 10 days to cover the 2,300 miles to Floyd, with a 1-day stop in Huxley.

Sharon had the movers put a hold on delivery of their furniture until they reached Iowa. They realtor had the phone on and the electricity on when they arrived. They put up in a motel and called the moving company and told them that the next day would be just fine for them to deliver the furniture. Ralph was on his way to Floyd when he saw the moving truck pull into the farm up the highway.

"My name is Ralph Perkins," Ralph said. "Are you the Ott's?"

"Just call me TOM, Ralph," Gary said unlimbering and rising to shake his hand.

"Is that your dog Missy?" Ralph asked. "The one you wrote about in your stories?"

“Yeah, but watch it Ralph,” Gary chuckled, “Or she’ll lick you to death loving you.”

“Then you must be Sharon,” Ralph said extending his hand.

“Yes,” Sharon replied. “Wrote about me in those stories, too, huh?”

“Who’s this fella?” Ralph asked.

“My name is Derek,” Derek replied.

“Still driving tanks?” Ralph asked.

“No, I quit the Guard when they reorganized and I couldn’t get into a tank unit,” Derek explained.

“I won’t keep you folks,” Ralph said. “Gary, we live down the gravel road to the south and west. Our place is the one right on the curve where the road turns north. We’ll be expecting you for supper at 6:00 and don’t give me any guff. There are a whole lot of people there who want to meet you and maybe even a surprise for you.”

“Is there anything you didn’t put in those stories of yours?” Sharon asked.

“Didn’t talk about our sex life,” Gary chuckled.

That shut her up. The movers were finished by early afternoon. Mary had driven up to pick up Derek and helped Sharon for an hour or so setting up the kitchen and unpacking some of those boxes. Then they left to return to Huxley. Gary helped Sharon finish unpacking the kitchen and they had everything put away by 5:00. The movers had assembled the beds and they took a minute to put sheets on the king-sized bed in the master bedroom on the main floor. They were new sheets that Sharon had brought from California. It was anybody’s guess which box held the old sheets. You’ve moved before and used a mover, right? She’d already listed the obvious damage and had forms for all of the hidden damage. Lots of forms!

Authors Note: Gary checked out the M1A very carefully after Ron left. It had a Harris bipod, that was obvious; but when he read the paperwork he discovered that Ron had gone whole hog. The barrel was a Douglas chrome moly barrel. Just what a man who’d turned 67 on his last birthday needed! A Grade-A sniper rifle. But, the price was right, free.

On The Cheap – Chapter 16 – Well, I'll be Danged

Probably! Gary and Sharon left a few minutes early at his insistence. Gary pointed to the corner where she was to turn right and then had Sharon drive slowly. Along the way, he pointed out where all of the sinkholes were. Then, inexplicably, Gary started to hum a song. Sharon recognized the song as an oldie that Gary sometimes hummed when he was in an especially good mood. The song was one by Kyu Sakamoto popular back when she was in high school.

“As the Class of 1963 was graduating and the Class of '64 was beginning their Senior Year, topping the charts for three weeks was *Sukiyaki*. Even though Japan is the world's second largest record market, while some say English speaking groups do pretty good in Japan, very few Japanese artists are or have been able to crack the American marketplace.

The actual title of this song is *UE O MUI TE ARUKO*, which translates to *I Look Up When I Walk*. When the song was released, the name had to be changed to something people would or could recognize...*Sukiyaki*. Newsweek at the time pointed out it would be like releasing *Moon River* in Japan and calling it *Beef Stew*. Gary was still humming the song when they arrived at the house at the end of the road. Ralph was standing there to greet them and old Gar-Bear was still humming that darned song.

“He's dead, you know,” Ralph said. “Got killed in the crash of a 747. I think it was in 1985.”

“Really?” Gary replied. “Hell, I didn't know that.”

Man, talk about an icebreaker. Ralph had the perfect touch. He hadn't known that *Sukiyaki* was one of Gary's all time top favorite songs. It was his favorite song period. Probably, if the truth were revealed, Gary would be forced to admit that it was his favorite too. But, the evening was young and old Gar-Bear was in for another surprise.

“Hey, Gary,” Bob said.

“Well, I'll be darned!” Gary said. “Robert Eugene Wahlstrom. I barely recognized you. How are you?”

“He's just fine you old reprobate,” a voice came from the other room.

“You know Bob,” Gary said, “If I didn't know better, I'd say that that voice belongs to Herbert Wayne Laube.”

“You still don't know crap,” Herb laughed, entering the room. “Did you ever figure out how to kiss a girl?”

“Knock it off or I'll tell your wife all about Abby,” Gary said extending his hand.

“Eek,” Herb said and then laughed. “It’s been a long time since I heard that name. I doubt that Leia would be surprised at any of your stories about when we were in high school.”

“How did you arrange this Ralph?” Gary asked.

“I called Bob down in Cedar Rapids and he called Herb up in Minneapolis and well, they put it all together,” Ralph chuckled. “It appears to me that you have bands of confederates all over the country. Let me introduce you to the other folks.”

Gary and Sharon were introduced to Lorraine, Julie, Becky and Steve, Jim and Barbara and the kids. Sharon had met Leia at the 20-year high school reunion. Bob’s wife couldn’t get away to come to Floyd so they still hadn’t met her. About that time, Robbie came sticking his big wet nose into the fray.

“What’s your dog’s name?” Gary asked in the general direction of the kids.

“Robbie,” Jennifer replied.

“I had a dog named Robbie back in 1970,” Gary said, “And it was a German Shepherd, too.”

“Well,” Becky said, “I had a German Shepherd name Robbie when I was growing up.”

“I don’t suppose that Robbie stands for Rob Roy does it?” Gary asked.

“How would you know something like that?” Becky asked.

“Pure coincidence Dr. Cooper,” Gary said, “My dog’s name was Rob Roy.”

“You’d better call me Becky,” Becky said, “Steve goes by Doctor or Doc.”

“Is anyone hungry beside me?” Ralph asked.

Everyone sat down and when Becky, Julie and Lorraine brought supper out of the kitchen, any reservations that Sharon had about making the move back to Iowa vanished. Obviously, someone had been reading Gary’s old stories because supper was breaded pork tenderloin sandwiches and fries. They even remembered the French’s Mustard and thinly sliced dill pickles, probably from a restaurant. Sharon started to talk a mile a minute like she does when she gets excited and Gary just sat and stared. Then, he fixed his sandwich the way he liked it and started to chow down.

“I see that you haven’t changed all that much,” Herb said.

“Sure I have Herb,” Gary replied. “I older and meaner and have a PhD in sarcasm.”

“So, it was only a master’s in high school?” Herb kidded.

“As I recall, I picked the sarcasm up from you,” Gary offered.

“So. Bob, are you still crawling around in the mud?” Herb asked.

A point of clarification. In high school Gary and Bob were ‘best friends’ and Gary and Herb were ‘best friends’. But, Bob and Herb had nothing in common and weren’t close friends, per se. Herb was the ladies man in high school, that’s why Gary hung around with him. Bob was the electronics whiz and that’s why Gary hung around with him. But, Gary wasn’t anything like either of the two individuals. Especially not after almost 50 years. You shouldn’t be looking for a new 3 amigos combination here.

After supper, the men went out and sat on the porch to visit. That way, anyone who had an inclination to smoke could. Gary lit up but knew that Bob didn’t smoke and suspected that Herb didn’t either. As it turned out, only Gary was a smoker and it made him a little self-conscious. But, when you’re 67 years old, who cares what other people think? Yeah, right! After a while, Herb and Bob said that they had to get back to the motel. Bob said that he was leaving for CR first thing in the morning, but that he’d be back up to Floyd soon. Herb said that Leia and he were on their way to a convention in Des Moines, but if they had the time, they’d stop by on the way back to Minneapolis. Maybe Bob would be back, but Gary didn’t really expect to see Herb again for a while.

“So, according to your stories, you seem to favor the M1A rifle,” Ralph said to get the conversation rolling.

“I do like the rifle Ralph,” Gary admitted, “But I didn’t own one until recently.”

“What model do you have?” Ralph asked.

“It’s the Super Match with all of the trimmings including the Douglas Chrome Moly steel barrel and a McMillan synthetic stock,” Gary replied.

“We have a fair number of M1A’s,” Ralph allowed.

“Good rifle,” Gary continued, “I just wish I had someplace to shoot it.”

“We have a 300-yard range,” Steve told him. “Any time you’re up to it, give Ralph a call and the two of you can go shooting.”

“Thanks Doc,” Gary said, “I may just take you up on that.”

“You can’t really shoot a rifle accurately for 600-yards can you?” Ralph asked.

“Oh, you mean Geraldo,” Gary chuckled. “Not really, no. But, you stand that SOB up against a tree and I’m willing to shoot until I hit him.”

“I noticed that you seem to have some pretty strong opinions, according to your stories,” Ralph observed.

“That’s me all right,” Gary agreed. “Never met a butthead that I didn’t want to wipe out.”

By this time Ralph was starting to take a liking to Gary. Gary seemed to be just as presented in his stories. What was it they called him? A crusty old curmudgeon? It fit Gary to a T. He was all of that and more. Ralph sensed that Gary was holding something back, however. A couple of times, Gary had started to say something and then cut himself off before he opened his mouth. Gary admitted he owned a M1A rifle and they were flat out illegal in California. Could it be that Gary had other equally illegal firearms? He’d sure written about guns a lot in his stories even though he’d always claimed that all he owned was a Sauer und Sohn and a Saturday Night Special. Come to think of it, both of those were illegal in California too.

“So Gary, do you still have that Sauer you talked about?” Ralph asked. “Always wanted to see one of those.”

“I do, Ralph,” Gary replied, “You didn’t think that a patriot fiction writer would give up a gun did you?”

“You’re an Endowment member of the NRA, according to your stories,” Ralph fished.

“Life member since 1964 and I can’t remember when I bought the Endowment or the Patron,” Gary replied. “I read all of the reports of that terrorist ambush in the papers Ralph. I’m not big on the BATF. I suspect that you folks have some automatic weapons, but it’s none of my business. Personally, I think everyone should own an automatic weapon.”

“You own any?” Ralph asked plainly.

“If I did, I sure wouldn’t tell someone I barely know, now would I?” Gary replied somewhat quickly.

“It’s ok Gary,” Ralph said, “You’re among friends here. We don’t have to start sharing any secrets. When you’re up to it I’d like to show you around the cave.”

“I would like to see that cave,” Gary said, “But I don’t imagine I’d be able to walk it all at once. How many miles of passages are there?”

“Just short of 6,” Steve said and described the cave to Gary. Of course, Gary had seen the map and he knew what the cave looked like. Still, he wanted to hear it. Then again, it made his feet hurt just thinking about it.

Ralph waited a while to let the folks get settled then drove up to the Ott's. Sharon let him in and Gary was sitting in a chair cleaning a rifle. Not any rifle, mind you, but that assault rifle that Ron had given him.

"A1?" Ralph asked.

Gary smiled and said, "A3."

"M4-FA?" Ralph asked, noticing the flashhider.

"And a bunch of Teflon coated magazines to go with it, Ralph," Gary added to his nod. "Got both rifles as a going away present from Ron Green, I'm sure you remember the name."

"Is his last name really Green?" Ralph asked.

"Sure, just like mine is Olsen," Gary laughed. "And Clarence's last name isn't Rawlings, either. Sure hated to break up that old gang of mine, but Ron Brown wanted to move to New Mexico to be with Robert and Clarence Floyd and his wife Shirley had kin in Alabama. He left Palmdale before I did. Ron showed up with the 2 rifles."

"You don't suppose he'd care to adopt me?" Ralph chuckled.

"Probably not, Ralph, but old Ron would have fit in pretty well here," Gary joined in the mirth. "Now being Iowa's so darned lily white, Clarence would have stood out some. But I think that you would have liked him too. Anyway, Ron showed up with the M1A and the M16A3 and I didn't have much choice except to accept the gifts."

"You said that you had a gut feeling that the stuff was about to about to hit the fan," Ralph got serious, "What was that all about?"

"I have no idea," Gary said. "Every once in a while I get a sinking feeling in my gut. Sometimes I'm right and sometimes, I couldn't be more wrong. I'll tell you one thing; we got out of California about the right time."

"Why would you say that?" Ralph wanted to know.

"Well, time was when California wasn't all that bad of a place to live," Gary explained. "I was stationed at Edwards AFB in the 1960's, probably about the same time you went to Nam, or maybe a little earlier. Darned nice place in the '60's. But, when we moved in '82, the place had gone to hell. Well, I was stuck, so we moved to the Antelope Valley. It wasn't too bad in '87 when we moved, but then all those folks moved up there and brought their gangster brats with them. Went to hell about 15 years ago. Anyway, to answer your question, there's a vocal minority of people in California who remember how it was and just flat refuse to give up their weapons."

“My son-in-law thinks that a revolution would be a bad thing for this country,” Ralph remarked.

“I’d have to agree with him, Ralph,” Gary nodded. “A thing like that could give those Democrats a reason to call in the UN and if that happens it won’t be pretty.”

On The Cheap – Chapter 17 – Looking Around

“If you have the rifle cleaned,” Ralph suggested, “How about taking a look at the cave?”

“That would be nice,” Gary said casing the rifle, “Cold down there is it?”

“Just shy of 50°,” Ralph explained.

“Better get a warm coat then,” Gary remarked, “My circulation isn’t so hot anymore and I get cold pretty quick.”

Gary dug out an old coat and they headed for Ralph’s pickup. Ralph drove them down to Steve and Becky’s and parked the truck. They got out and went to the old farmhouse and Ralph stuck his head in the door.

“Anybody home?” he called.

“Come in Daddy,” Becky said. “Oh hi Mr. Ott.”

“Might just be easier if both of you just called me TOM,” Gary said, “I’ve sort of gotten used to it and I really am a Tired Old Man.”

“Well TOM,” Ralph said, “Let me show you the Floyd Municipal Shelter.”

Ralph, Gary and Becky went down to the basement and Ralph opened the trapdoor to the cave. The flight of stairs down to the cave floor was a bit longer than Gary had imagined it might be, 60 steps, but he made it ok. Ralph flipped on a switch on the way down, flooding the cave with light.

“I’ve seen the maps, but it’s a lot bigger than I visualized,” Gary said.

“Just wait, TOM,” Becky urged, “You haven’t seen the bigger parts.”

“I remember the map, Becky,” Gary acknowledged, “The main room is to the right isn’t it?”

“That’s correct,” Ralph said, “We put all of the equipment in what was the main room. As you may recall, Steve had the tunnel opened at your friend’s suggestion that leads to that sinkhole you guys tried to open. That’s actually the largest part of the cave.”

“Does anyone have a flash light?” Gary asked.

“I suppose we could find one,” Ralph replied, “Why would you want one?”

“If you wouldn’t mind, I’d like to use a flashlight and have you turn out the lights,” Gary explained. “Somehow it just doesn’t seem right seeing this cave for the first time with all

of these lights on. Back when Bob and I were exploring the caves around here 50 years ago, all we had was carbide lamps. You get a whole different feel for a cave when there isn't much light."

What you get is an eerie feeling is what Gary was trying to say. Lighted only with a flashlight, a cave can be very eerie. He didn't want to tell them that, it was just an old man's foolishness. Ralph dug around in the main room and came up with 3 MagLites from a drawer and flipped the manual override cutting the electricity from the surface.

"Now that's more like it," Gary said.

"It's eerie, if you ask me," Becky said.

"That's right Becky, it's really is eerie, isn't it?" Gary chuckled. "The way the light creates shadows and everything, your imagination can go wild. Hell, a guy could almost imagine seeing ghosts. Say is that Buddy Holly over there?"

"Was that plane crash near here?" Ralph asked, picking up on where Gary was going.

"Not that close," Gary admitted, "Just my sense of humor."

"I do see what you mean," Becky said. "I've been down here before using only hand lanterns with the 6-volt batteries. Didn't occur to me at that time."

"The thing is, Becky," Gary chuckled, "I've always been afraid of the dark. Don't really know why. Most of the caves that Bob and I crawled around in were small enough that it never became an issue. The way a flashlight plays off the rocks and all of that equipment you folks have down here, it can be a little spooky. I appreciate you letting me see it like this Ralph, but you probably ought to turn the lights back on."

"You're a strange one," Ralph said not un-approvingly when he returned from turning on the lights.

"Why, thank you Ralph," Gary replied, "I'll take that as a compliment."

"Let me show you something," Ralph said. Apparently Ralph had concluded that he had nothing to fear from Gary when it came to somewhat less than legal firearms. Gary had also shown him the M1A and both of Gary's rifles were equipped with suppressors. Anyway, he took Gary to the main room armory and revealed where the automatic weapons were stored.

"That's downright clever, Ralph," Gary said. "I always had some secret gun room or something in my stories."

"I know," Ralph said, "But this was so much easier. What do you think of our little collection?"

“What did you use on those terrorists?” Gary asked admiring the collection of AKs, M416s and M417s.

“Only had the AK’s and M1A’s back then,” Ralph explained. “We set up on both sides of the road and cut them down. Then, everyone with an AK bugged out to the cave and I collected the suppressors from the M1A’s and headed down here. Becky handled the cops until I got back. It took the ATF a while to check us out and they spent 2 days looking, but never found the AK’s. The IHP officers are from around here but they would have arrested us if they had the chance, so we didn’t give them one. Now the Sheriff is a politician and he just looked the other way.”

“Well, you got lucky, that’s plain enough,” Gary replied. “The LEO’s have to enforce the laws, even if they don’t agree with them. Sounds like you made it easy on them. I never would have thought of a hiding place like this.”

“Obviously they didn’t either or I’d be sitting in the hoosegow somewhere,” Ralph chuckled.

“Daddy, how can you laugh about something like going to jail,” Becky harangued her father.

“You’ve seen the main room, Gary; are your feet up to checking out the large branch where we have the sleeping quarters?” Ralph asked ignoring his daughter.

“Barely, but sure, let’s take a look at it,” Gary answered.

“I’m going upstairs and let you lawbreakers explore the cave,” Becky laughed.

Ralph showed the large branch to Gary. Gary wanted to know where the limestone slab had been and Ralph pointed that out. Gary was amazed at the shelter, and the size of that branch the Bob and he had tried so hard to get into.

“One of these days you’ll have to show me that long branch to that big sinkhole Ralph,” Gary suggested, “But I’ve had about all of the walking I can handle for one day.”

“When we do that, I’ve have a vehicle meet us at the sinkhole so we don’t have to walk back,” Ralph offered. “Steve and Jim set up some composting toilets a way up that branch. Down in the direction of the river, they managed some shower stalls so that people could clean up if they had to stay here for very long. What do you think of our use of the cave?”

“Pretty impressive Ralph, pretty impressive,” Gary replied.

Iowa is very humid. Not on the order of some place like Florida, but the heat and the humidity are what make that corn grow in the summer. Gary and Sharon had to add

several window air conditions to the old farmhouse they bought and they stayed indoors a lot. Sharon found a quilting group in the area and was off to 'circle' a couple of days a week. Gary didn't drive and he contented himself by surfing the web and watching TV. Ralph occasionally stopped by and Gary usually ended up going somewhere with him; either to look at more of the cave or, more importantly, to the firing range. Gary would have needed 3-4 magazines to take out Geraldo that much was evident. On the other hand, given the quality of the rifle and scope, he could keep all of the bullets in the man-sized silhouette at 300-yards by the end of summer.

It had been a long hot summer back in California and there had been trouble in Los Angeles. Something on the order of the Watts riot or the Rodney King affair. Not enough for the government to do much more than activate the Guard, but it gave old Gar-Bear a foreboding. The church ladies showed up and helped Becky, Lorraine and Julie with the gardening, picking and preparation and they put up more than double the usual number of jars of vegetables. They also canned chicken, beef and pork and it looked like they could last a fair amount of time in the Community Shelter if push came to shove. Doc was really busy that summer and he didn't get involved in the Shelter too much. Little Jennifer was excited about starting Kindergarten in the fall and Stevie was really growing up.

"I suppose that I should have gone over to Charles City for the Boggess family picnic," Gary told Ralph. "But there must be 400 of them if they all show up and I don't really know more than a couple of dozen of those people."

Thomas Wolfe, an extraordinary author of the first part of the 20th Century, wrote a book titled, *You Can't Go Home Again*. Never read it, but I read a little about Wolfe. Guess I should have read the book, because I couldn't figure out what he was getting at with the title. Wolfe wrote about real people and real life. Was he telling us that you could never go home again because it wasn't the same place as when you grew up? Whatever. I'm a little old to start reading Wolfe. Maybe Patton was right and I'll read the books next lifetime. ("You can't go back home to your family, back home to your childhood ... back home to a young man's dreams of glory and of fame ... back home to places in the country, back home to the old forms and systems of things which once seemed everlasting but which are changing all the time – back home to the escapes of Time and Memory.")

"From reading your stories and having met you," Ralph observed, "It seems if I've known you most of my life. Family is nice, but immediate family is what counts. I gather that you have 4 kids from reading your stories."

"I do, yes," Gary replied. "Damon is over in Mason City, Derek is in Huxley and the girls are in Palmdale."

"If it were me," Ralph ventured, "I'd be thinking of getting those girls out of California."

"I wish it were that simple, Ralph," Gary replied. "Our youngest, Amy, is divorced and has two mixed blood children. I don't imagine that would be the problem, but we'd sure hate to have her living with us again. Now, if she could find a good job in Charles City, it might be a different story. Our oldest girl, Lorrie, has been with the same fella for years. I don't know if David would be interested in moving to Iowa or not."

"What kind of work does he do?" Ralph asked.

"Locksmith; works down in LA," Gary answered.

"If he works in LA, he might be ready to get the hell out of California," Ralph suggested.

"Have you ever been to LA?" Gary asked.

"Took Becky to Disneyland once," Ralph said. "Didn't care much for it then and I seriously doubt I care for it now."

"It really is different than Iowa," Gary went on. "In southern California, white folks are a minority. There are a lot of Hispanics, Blacks and people from all over the world stuffed into the city."

"I noticed that in the '80's when we were there," Ralph agreed. "But, America is the great melting pot and immigrants have to start somewhere. On the other hand, this country sure has changed from when I was growing up."

"I know what you mean Ralph," Gary said. "I can remember a time when people didn't lock their doors."

"What got you into being a survivalist?" Ralph asked.

"I really don't know," Gary said. "It goes way back. Maybe it started when I was in high school. Every time there was a tornado warning, I'd fill up a couple of canteens and sit it out in the basement."

"And after?" Ralph inquired.

"Well, around '67 I was out of college working for my Dad over in Charles City," Gary said. "Got it in my head that I wanted to go to Vermont or Canada and live off the land. Spent the entire summer accumulating supplies. Then, I had an injury at work and ended up with surgery on my right leg. That ended that and I went back to college in the fall. Met my first wife that year. Always kept some supplies around for whatever reason after that."

"So you're a want-to-be survivalist," Ralph chuckled.

“Yes and no,” Gary continued. “My first wife’s dad taught me how to trap and live off the land. Never had to do it, but I could get by in a pinch. Trapping isn’t that hard to do but it is a lot of work. Once you get a trap line out, you have to check it twice a day and take care of the pelts you get.”

“And the shooting?” Ralph asked.

“There was a time when I was deadly with a handgun,” Gary replied. “But it takes practice and I got away from it once I moved to California. Too much trouble to find a place to shoot and, I traveled a lot back in those days.”

On The Cheap – Chapter 18 – Mounds v. Almond Joy

“And after you quit your job with Iowa?” Ralph asked.

“I was a lost man for a while,” Gary said. “Got my HAM license and worked for a CPA in San Francisco for a time. Then I went to school to become an Alcohol and Drug Abuse Counselor. That got me into a bad phase in my life I’d just as soon forget. During that phase, I ended up disabled and that’s the end of the story.”

“I’m sure that there’s more to it than that,” Ralph said. “I went to work for Hy-Vee out of high school and ended up managing a store in Des Moines. Starting putting food up because of the winter storms and it just kept going. Went into the service and did my time in ‘Nam, of course. That’s where I picked up those dozen AK’s. It was positively a bear getting them stateside, but I managed. Built up a pretty substantial gun collection and I shot skeet for a while, but then the pressures of the job got to be too much. Ended up with that little heart problem and retired. Lorraine and I moved to Floyd to be near Becky and our grandchildren.”

“Where does the cave fit into your story?” Gary asked.

“Steve discovered it while they were replacing the ½ basement with a full basement,” Ralph explained. “Jim and he did most of the work early on and mapped the thing. That’s when your friend Bob got into the act. Anyway, it started out as a family and friends sort of shelter and just blossomed from there. Not all that long after they got the place fixed up as a community shelter, there was that train wreck and the terrorists blew up Hilton Coliseum. Now, they have the Ladies Auxiliaries from the churches helping them garden and can.”

“When I saw what was happening with the government, I stocked up on some off-the-books M16’s and bought those Super Match rifles. Steve and Becky paid for them, but I bought them and added the accessories.” he continued. “I recently bought 24 military rifles, half 5.56 and half 7.62 and have yet to take delivery. Then you moved back to Iowa and you know the story from there.”

“Ralph I don’t like the looks of where this country is headed,” Gary said.

“TOM, I don’t either,” Ralph agreed. “All the terrorists have done is taken a vacation from attacking this country. And with the state the military is in, we’d be hard pressed to defend this country if someone were to invade.”

“By someone, do you mean the UN?” Gary asked.

“It stands to reason,” Ralph grimaced. “Say we had another terrorist attack that had a country wide effect. Those liberals in Washington would probably end up screaming for help and invite the UN in or not resist an offer of help.”

"I've written a dozen different scenarios in my stories," Gary said. "I suppose that what you're suggesting is the most likely. From what I've seen on the Discovery channel, Yellowstone won't blow its top anytime soon and the odds of an asteroid hitting the planet are pretty remote. A global climate change is possible, but we should get ample warning. Something like they had in that movie, "The Day After Tomorrow" will probably never happen. I said probably because I never say never. What kind of guns are you waiting on?"

"You're probably right, TOM," Ralph agreed. "I sure hope that I don't live to see it. I'm waiting on some H&Ks."

Too late Ralph! It was already taking root; it was just that no one realized it. There are, in the United States, all sorts of separatist groups, would be militias and the like. Congress and the President had pushed the people of the country too far and anger was building up a real head of steam. What happened to the Minoan civilization and Atlantis? What happened to the Greek civilization and the Roman Empire? The first two were probably destroyed by the same cataclysm; a volcanic event that destroyed an island and had the pyroclastic flow destroying the Minoans. The Greeks and Romans fell from internal decay. They got too fat, too comfortable and tried to rule the world. Remember the blind man with the lantern? Diogenes, wasn't it? Looking for one honest man, I believe. Well, he wouldn't find one anytime soon, especially if he checked out Washington, DC. What about the war to end all wars?

World War One began with a minor assassination in a small corner of a long-forgotten empire in Europe. Yet it was to become history's first truly global conflict. It embroiled some 30 countries across five continents and was fought on a scale never before seen by mankind. As the war gained momentum, and nation upon nation rallied its troops, it became evident the 20th century was upon us. Yet much of the world remained in the 19th century.

Cavalrymen rode to war on horseback wearing gaudy, plumed helmets and brightly colored uniforms, brandishing sabers. Some even took along household items and servants, believing that military convention had changed little since Wellington and Napoleon met on the battlefields of Waterloo. World War One changed all that.

The powder keg in the Balkans exploded in 1914. The tensions in Europe snapped. Armies marched, and four weary years later, in 1918, exhausted combatants laid down their arms. WWI was finally over.

An estimated 13,000,000 soldiers were dead or missing. Europe had lost almost an entire generation of men. Unknown numbers of civilians lay dead. The landscape of Europe looked like a lunar surface.

Almost overnight, empires that had taken centuries to build were gone. The United States had transformed itself into a world power. At the Paris peace negotiations, the world looked to Woodrow Wilson as peacemaker and embodiment of democracy.

The way war was fought changed forever.

Women now held jobs that in the past had been done exclusively by men. Many more women had joined the military, and played a major role in the victory. Americans who had never ventured beyond state borders found themselves in places they couldn't even pronounce. Yes, the face of the world had changed, and the War to End All Wars became the first in a long line of wars to come.

"You know, Ralph," Gary said, "I didn't make up the scenarios completely. I looked around on the web and got ideas. Sometimes it was a newspaper article and sometimes it was a *white paper* someone had written. I just picked up the ball and ran a ways with it. One of these days, in the not too distant future, all hell is going to break loose and that might just end up being the war that ends all wars."

"I take it that you think humanity is going to wipe itself out," Ralph suggested.

"Unless the Martians get us first," Gary laughed.

"What? You're kidding, right?" Ralph asked.

"Yeah, but you had to ask," Gary said.

"And I take it that your point is that I don't know you as well as I think I do," Ralph grinned.

"Sort of, Ralph," Gary explained. "You know that part of me that I've chosen to reveal. We all hold a little back; it's just a natural defense mechanism."

"Like your sarcasm," Ralph said. "Your friend Herb seemed to indicate that that's something you use a lot of."

"You should have ask Derek about it when you met him," Gary suggested, "He says that my wit is dryer than the Sahara Desert. I really don't know what is going to happen to this country, my friend," Gary continued, "But whatever it is won't be good and I think the pot is about to boil over."

"What about our preparations?" Ralph asked,

"If you have 14 days of food and access to water, you're in good shape," Gary said.

"I get it, the 343 hours thing," Ralph brightened up. "Dang, you don't suppose that we're going to face a nuclear confrontation do you?"

"Seems to me I heard about 4 missing nukes over in Iraq at one time or another," Gary recalled.

"I think it was those 4 missing nukes that got Steve and Becky started on this project in the first place," Ralph informed Gary. "There are those supposedly missing Russian nukes and with North Korea and Iran probably being nuclear powers by now, there is no telling what all of these terrorist organizations have gotten their hands onto and smuggled into this country."

"Don't forget the sleeper cells, friend," Gary brought up, "Those Chechen people came into the US in July of 2004, but didn't act until May of 2009. The US even trained the terrorists that took out the WTC and Pentagon. What if a terrorist group used nuclear weapons to attack key portions of this country's infrastructure? It might not be like in my stories where the US picked itself up and rebuilt. Hell, partner, they could shut down some stuff for years."

"TOM, it's been fascinating visiting with you, but I have chores to do," Ralph said. "Ok if we continue this conversation later?"

"Sure Ralph, I enjoy visiting with someone who doesn't act like I'm a complete crackpot," Gary chuckled.

Gary's attitude reminded Ralph of the Mounds and Almond Joy commercial.

Sometimes you feel like a nut and sometimes you don't. He didn't really have chores to do, but they'd been talking for hours. What he wanted to do was to get with Steve and Becky and run some of what Gary had to say by them and get their reactions. He had to admit to himself that he more agreed with Gary than he disagreed with him. Gary, for all of his eccentricities, seemed to be a student of history. Well, being eccentric wasn't necessarily bad; they'd called Steve an eccentric Vet in the Press. The date, by the way, was Saturday, August 22, 2010.

"I spent quite a bit of time visiting with TOM today," Ralph announced.

"Oh, what did he know?" Steve asked.

"Nothing real specific, Steve," Ralph replied, "But he did mention nukes and talked about sleeper cells and seemed to think that the US is in pretty deep doo-doo."

"There's nothing startling in that, Daddy," Becky suggested. "Those nukes are what got Steve and me started on a shelter in the first place."

"Yes, I told him that," Ralph explained. "How are things going with the canning?"

"We are just about done," Lorraine said. "Steve is there any more livestock that are at market weight that we could butcher?"

“One steer is close to market weight and we could slaughter up to 200 chickens,” Steve replied. “Am I sensing some urgency here?”

“I really don’t know,” Ralph said, “I think that I’m going to run down to Des Moines on Monday and check with Smith. He said he was getting in a shipment of surplus ammo the first part of August.”

“Daddy, that sounds awfully urgent to me,” Becky observed.

“I’ll see if Gary wants to ride down with me to keep me company,” Ralph announced ignoring Becky’s observation completely.

“Gary, phone,” Sharon said.

“Who is it?” Gary asked.

“Ralph Perkins,” she replied.

“Hi Ralph I didn’t expect to hear from you so soon, what’s up?” Gary asked.

“Gary, I buy my ammo from a guy in Des Moines named Smith,” Ralph started. “I’m going to take a run down there on Monday and pick up some extra surplus ammo. I thought that you might like to ride along and keep me company.”

“I know about Smith,” Gary said, “Derek was in his shop checking out M1A’s.”

“Yep, that’s the guy,” Ralph agreed, “Do you want to ride along?”

“Are you taking your pickup or car?” Gary asked.

“I’m taking my pickup, why?” Ralph asked.

“Would there be enough room in that pickup for me to bring back some ammo, too?” Gary asked.

“No problem,” Ralph said.

“What time do you want to leave on Monday morning?” Gary asked.

“Six too early?” Ralph asked back.

“See you at 6, Monday morning Ralph and thanks for asking,” Gary said. He hung up.

“Sharon how are we money wise?” Gary asked.

“We’re ok, why do you ask?” Sharon replied.

“Well, I’d like to get Amy and Lorrie back here in Iowa,” Gary said. “I’m pretty sure that Amy can get a job with the State given her college degree and I wouldn’t want to leave Lorrie stranded in California.”

On The Cheap – Chapter 19 – Smith's

That started a discussion that lasted well into the night. By the time they had discussed all possible angles and the reasons for Gary wanting the girls to move, Sharon was in favor of it. She said that she'd call both girls the next day and talk to them about it. Gary also asked her for a rather substantial sum of money to buy guns and ammunition. He explained that he was riding to Des Moines with Ralph on Monday and that he was getting the ammo at that time. He went on to say that he wanted to make sure that Derek and Mary had some minimal protections in case TSHTF. Because they had a rather substantial amount of cash left over from the sale of the house in Palmdale, Sharon agreed to humor Gary. She told him that whatever was spent to arm the boys would only be half of what they spent. An equal sum would go towards helping the girls move back from California if they wanted to come.

"Derek, this is your Dad," Gary said.

"Oh hi Dad," Derek replied, "What's up?"

"Did you ever get a FAL or M1A rifle?" Gary asked.

"Never had the money," Derek admitted.

Look, I'm going to be in Des Moines on Monday," Gary explained, "Can you meet me at Smith's around noon?"

"I suppose what for?" Derek asked.

"It's time you had your own M1A," Gary said. "Hell maybe 2, one for Mary. Come to think of it, can you have Mary meet us there? I want to buy you kids hand guns, too and there's that 30-day limit."

"What about Damon?" Derek asked.

"I'll take care of Damon separately, Derek," Gary said, "There are special considerations there."

"Ok," Derek agreed. "See you at noon on Monday at Smith's."

The special considerations were that Damon couldn't legally own firearms until the 5 years were up since his last hospitalization. Besides, Damon would only want a shotgun anyway and Gary intended to buy a couple of 870s or 590A1s and lend one to Damon if the need arose. The biggest worry was Derek and Mary. They were only 2 hours away, but if TSHTF, it might be impossible for them to get to Floyd without advance warning. Gary realized that he was going to have to stretch what Sharon had allowed him to spend a long way. Besides, whatever he spent would only be half of what they'd end up spending if the girls decided to come back.

Monday morning...

"Morning Ralph, I brought a thermos of coffee," Gary said.

"Black, I hope," Ralph replied.

"Yep and it'll put hair on your chest," Gary laughed. "I hope you don't mind, but I asked Derek and Mary to meet us at Smith's," Gary commented.

"You said that they lived in Huxley, we could have dropped off the ammo on the way home," Ralph said, "Or, do you have something else in mind?"

"They don't have any good weapons Ralph and I figured to get them each a M1A or a FAL plus a M1911," Gary explained.

"Is used, ok?" Ralph asked.

"Sure, if they're in good shape," Gary said.

"Smith had a bunch of very good used FAL's he picked up somewhere," Ralph said. "If he hasn't sold them all, you can get a good price. Now if you're in the market for something a little more exotic, I can have a word with him for you."

"Maybe something like those real quiet flashhiders that really hide the flash," Gary risked asking.

"Those and things that go ratta-tat-tat-tat," Ralph smiled.

"We'll have to see how far my cash goes," Gary said. "But I definitely would be interested, especially if they went ratta-tat-tat-tat very quietly."

"They can," Ralph said, "All it takes is money to shut someone or something up."

They stopped for breakfast on the way and arrived at Smith's just after he opened. Ralph immediately took the guy aside and spoke with him at length. Then Ralph went ahead and purchased several cases of Lake City surplus 5.56 ammo and several cases of the 7.62 surplus. He also purchased several of the now illegal 20-round M1A magazines. Gary was up next. Gary bought 12,000 rounds of 7.62 surplus, 15,000 rounds of Lake City 5.56 and 4,000 round of 230 grain FMJ .45 ammo. The total was rather substantial.

"I understand that you're the guy that wrote that story called *The Ark*," the man said.

"Uh, yeah, I did," Gary replied, "Is that a problem?"

“You used the name of my store in your story without permission didn’t you?” the man asked.

“Afraid so, is that a problem?” Gary asked.

“Hell no, business has never been better,” the man said, “I can give you a 15% discount.”

“Remember in that story how I brought in my son and daughter-in-law and my buddy bought guns for them?” Gary asked.

“Yeah, in your story, you spent a fair amount in this store,” the guy laughed.

“Well, my son and daughter-in-law will be here at noon,” Gary said. “They want either FAL’s or M1A’s and some of those exotic 5.56 rifles you have. Oh, and good used M1911’s.”

“I’ll up the discount to 20% for cash and see that those weapons they want are fully equipped,” the man said.

Around 1:30, Gary and Ralph walked out of the store. It had been a long and expensive morning. The dealer had Canadian L1A1 and L2A1 FAL’s in near mint condition and the suppressors to match. The kids would be picking up 2 of the FAL’s s and 2 very good used M1911’s in 5 days and were carrying hard shell gun cases that held a very quiet M16A3’s (M4-FA flashhiders). They followed Mary back to Huxley and dropped off $\frac{2}{3}$ of the ammo that Gary had purchased.

The next day, Gary asked Ralph to drive him into Charles City. Once there, Gary ordered 3 Mossberg 590A1 12-gauge shotguns with ghost ring sights. He also got a Taurus PT1911B pistol with 5 extra mags (they come with two). The girls had told Sharon that they were more than ready to leave California. Lorrie wanted to know about locksmithing opportunities in Iowa and Sharon had told Lorrie that they’d set David up in business. Amy had told her mother to send money and she’d be there in 3 weeks, no questions asked. Gary didn’t feel nearly so badly about what he’d spent on Derek and Mary once he found out that Sharon had offered to set David up in business. Locksmithing fortunately is a moderately priced business to establish, it depends on a great degree on how many specialized machines you get like those decoders for the electronic ignition keys. At least, that’s what David told Sharon on the phone.

Gary wasn’t certain what he wanted to use in the shotguns, 3” 15-pellet 00 buck or 2 $\frac{3}{4}$ ” 12-pellet 00 buck. He ordered 4 cases of 15-pellet plus 4 cases of the 3” Brenneke 1 $\frac{3}{8}$ oz Black Magic slugs. Why? Well back in 1970, he’d read an article in a LEO oriented magazine that said that the Brenneke slug was better than the American slugs. He didn’t really know if it were true then or 35-years later, but... The store had to order the slugs especially for him and they would take longer than the 15-pellet 00 Buck to come in. To hell with shooting what patterned best he had his mind made up and didn’t want

anyone to confuse him with the facts. He probably should have just ordered the slugs from Cheaper Than Dirt.

Then, old Gar-Bear remembered what he'd forgotten and called Smith back for extra magazines for the M1911's. He paid for them over the phone with the debit card and had 8 held for Derek. Moving back to Iowa hadn't seemed to improve his memory much.

"Dad, this is Derek," Derek said.

"What's up kid?"

"I just wanted to thank you for the guns," Derek said.

"Your sisters will be moving back to Iowa from California," Gary replied. "My buying the guns for you two was totally selfish, don't worry about it. Say, when you pick up the rifles, pick up the extra 7 round M1911 magazines they're holding for you."

"How many did you buy?" Derek asked.

"Four apiece for you and Mary," Gary responded. "Better pick up some ALICE gear too with magazine pouches."

"Are you expecting something to happen?" Derek asked.

"Better to be prepared than not," Gary replied. "My crystal ball is in the cleaners. But, if TSHTF, you bug out to Floyd. Dang fancy shelter they built in that cave."

"Ok, I'll get the ALICE gear next paycheck," Derek agreed.

"Put together a 72-hour bugout bag for each of you too, kid," Gary advised.

"What are you going to do about Damon?" Derek asked.

"Why is something wrong?" Gary asked.

"Guns, Dad, we were talking about guns," Derek said.

"Oh, I bought 3 590A1s and a Taurus .45," Gary said, "He only wanted a shotgun in the first place, remember? I figure he can use one of the 590A1s. Why are you waiting for next payday for the ALICE gear?"

"Money's a little tight because we had to put tires on the pickup," Derek explained.

"Forget it kid, I figure that bringing the girls back is going to cost more than Sharon thinks it will. I've got to get some too, so I'll just buy a bunch over in Mason City," Gary

insisted. "I'll do the bugout bags too, that way they'll be set up the way I think they should be. Can you afford the gas to come up here and pick them up?"

"Not really," Derek said.

"I'll think of something," Gary said. "Gotta go, talk to you later."

Gary had been on the net checking out locksmithing equipment. Late model cars used security systems that required a computer just to duplicate a key. The equipment could get very expensive. Some automotive keys could cost upwards to \$100 or more to duplicate, per key. He didn't spend long on the net to determine that Sharon was in for a rude awakening. He guessed it depended upon what David was into and what he wanted to do in his new shop. He figured he'd better get to Mason City before Sharon clamped down on the purse strings and wouldn't give him the money for the ALICE gear he wanted.

Sharon had listened to David describe some the locksmithing equipment he might need. She had her Dell computer that was off more than on and she wasn't about to start buying David computers, etc. She would just give him her Dell; it was as good as new, anyway. She was wrong, in this case, it wouldn't work and Gary could have told her that. But like so many married couples, rather than fight, they kept their mouths shut. She couldn't see why he needed so many guns; he could only shoot one at a time. She did agree with him on one thing. The US was going to hell in a hand basket. She hadn't shot a gun since she was a teenager and she wasn't about to resume her shooting career any time soon, or so she thought. The simple truth was that a whole lot of people who hadn't been into using firearms would learn or die in the foreseeable future.

On The Cheap – Chapter 20 – Winter Weather

Between the military reorganizing and the cuts the Democrats had made in the 2 years since they had resumed control in Washington, the US was in pretty bad shape. Ralph was just short of terrified at the possibilities he could see. Even smooth tempered, unexcitable Doc was worried. He had a few unpaid bills for services rendered and decided that it was maybe time to have a talk with those farmers. He went from farm to farm and negotiated a settlement with each man, usually an in-kind deal. That is to say that he took chickens, hogs and beef cattle in exchange for the balance on the accounts. Most of the bills weren't all that big and he came away with some chickens or something. One guy paid him with a calf and, well you get the idea. It squared accounts with everyone he was carrying on the books and they were happy because they got off cheaply.

All of the propane tanks were finally topped off, although that had taken longer than anticipated. The gardens had produced a bumper crop and they had canned a lot of veggies and meat plus several cases of stew. All told, they probably had over 5,000 quarts of food stored up, all fresh from the summer of 2010. There were just certain things that weren't within their capability to preserve, so they had gone online and bought that stuff by the case. This included things like powdered eggs, etc.

Gary's stomach was giving him fits. He didn't know if it was that old warning system his brain had connected to his belly or gastritis, but he was popping Prevacid just to keep it settled. The date was now Sunday, September 5, 2010. A strange thing had happened when Derek stopped by Smith's to pick up the L1A1's. The guy had given Derek all of his guns including the M1911's. His explanation was that he was shutting down his store and heading out to his cabin at Holiday Lake, west of Des Moines. Derek's boss paid a small quarterly bonus and had distributed it early this year, saying he thought the extra money might come in handy. It did, Derek walked away with a couple of good used Remington shotguns. They were used police equipment but the gunsmith had worked them over pretty good. Derek also bought some tactical buckshot.

On that Sunday, Gary persuaded Sharon to drive down to Huxley and he delivered the bugout bags and ALICE gear. They didn't stay long either; Gary was itching to get back home. In his stories, Gary usually had major terrorist events occurring on a holiday and the next day was Labor Day. In this case, Gary was wrong, which was a good thing. His Brenneke slugs hadn't come in yet and the girls still hadn't moved back to Iowa from California. The Cooper and Perkins families were having a Labor Day picnic, too.

"So, Ralph, how the hell are you?" Gary asked.

"Been busy TOM," Ralph said. "We have been tying up loose ends in case TSHTF."

"Smith let Derek take his pistols home early," Gary said.

"Yeah, he called me and said that he was closing the store and moving his inventory to that cabin he has out at Holiday Lake," Ralph explained. "Wanted to know if I needed

anything else before he moved it. I think that he was just trying to unload the stuff so that he didn't have to move it."

"Yeah, Derek had a little extra cash because his boss paid his bonus a month early and Derek picked up a couple of used, reworked 870's," Gary commented. "We did a quick run to Huxley yesterday to give them the bugout bags and ALICE gear."

"What do you hear from the girls?" Ralph asked.

"Amy should be here in a few days according to Sharon," Gary revealed. "I'm not sure about David and Lorrie."

"So, both of your daughters are coming back to Iowa, huh?" Ralph summarized.

"Yeah, but I hope that they don't stay with us for too long," Gary chuckled. "We have the room to put them up for a while, but I've had about all of having kids move back in I can stand for one lifetime."

"I forgot to tell you," Sharon said joining the conversation. "Lorrie called and they sold their house. Hi Ralph. Anyway, the buyer wants to move in quickly and had the bank loan prearranged so they should be here in about 2 weeks. David said they did really good on selling the house so he won't need me to set him up in business."

"That just goes to prove that there's a God in Heaven," Gary smiled.

"Well, since we won't be spending money to set him up in business, dear," Sharon grinned evilly, "You can just buy David some firearms like you did Derek and Damon."

Sharon walked off to talk to Lorraine and Gary looked at Ralph strangely.

"Did I hear that right, Ralph? Did she just tell me to buy more guns?"

"That's what the lady said," Ralph nodded.

"I thought about buying a generator and a bunch of survival oriented things," Gary continued, "But since you have that fancy cave of yours, I was wondering how you'd feel about our just coming there if something goes wrong."

"That's a foregone conclusion TOM," Ralph said. "You might want to move some things to the cave, like extra clothes, medications and some of your guns and ammo."

"That's a good idea Ralph," Gary agreed. "I'll keep that assault rifle and the .45 when I pick it up and move everything else over here. "You do realize that I won't be much help if something happens, don't you?"

"I'm not so sure I agree with that, TOM," Ralph parried. "You obviously done a lot of re-search for your stories and knowledge is power, as you've said more than once."

"Yeah, if I can remember all of that stuff, it is," Gary chuckled.

"You don't have to," Ralph suggested, "Just print out a copy of all of your stories."

The picnic went off without a hitch and the terrorists didn't strike that day. The following day, Gary warmed up his massive HP 9000 printer and printed a copy of all of those stories, just like Ralph had suggested. He figured that he had stuff at least 50% right in the stories so they'd make a good reference. The store called and his slugs were in so he got Sharon to drive him to Charles City to pick them up. By the time the kids were moved to Iowa, he'd even have that .45. He also picked up 4 boxes of .32acp for the Sauer so he could arm Sharon if push came to shove. That little gun looked just like a PPK and it would fit her hand perfectly. One thing he had to do was to get her to the range and teach her how to use it. That would be like pulling teeth!

The old farmhouse they'd bought was a 2-story house with a full basement. It was heated by propane and powered by the REA. Neither one of them much cared for climbing stairs, so Gary and Sharon mostly lived on the main floor. There were 4 bedrooms on the second floor so there would be plenty of room for the kids, temporarily. Gary had bought some of those rectangular plastic boxes with the hinged lids before they'd left California and he'd arranged all of their extra food in those boxes. In an emergency, the food could be loaded aboard a pickup and hauled anywhere easily.

The farm buildings had all been torn down, but the farmer had left his 300-gallon gas tank. All there really was on that place was the house, the well house, a detached garage and the gas tank. Gary figured that he wouldn't be up to shoveling snow so either someone would have to blade out the driveway or they'd just have to sit tight through the winter. He didn't know that Jim had one of his men blade out Steve and Ralph's driveways and had added their driveway to the list.

When you get older, the clocks run faster and in no time, Gary was able to get to Charles City and pick up his .45. Lorraine and Becky had talked Sharon into going to the range and Gary had tagged along and shown Sharon how to operate the Sauer. He'd had to teach her that overhand cocking trick Fleataxi had told him about so she could cock the thing, but she'd finally figured everything out. Couldn't hit the broadside of a barn, but practice would cure that. The pistol jammed and Gary took it to a gunsmith to get the feed ramp polished.

The first of October 2010 rolled around and they'd had their first snowfall. Jim's man had bladed out the driveway and Gary had to buy a snow shovel to clean the walk. The kids were now back in Iowa and David and Lorrie had found a place in Charles City and put a down payment on it. Amy was signed up to take a state of Iowa merit exam and there was a position open that she really wanted over in Mason City. Gary didn't see a whole lot of Damon. Damon was working for that insulation company in Mason City and

they did jobs all over the state of Iowa and in southern Minnesota. Gary had fixed up a BOB for Damon and fairly insisted that Damon take it with him wherever he went. As they got into the winter season, Damon was home more because they don't do much construction in the upper Midwest in the winter.

Sharon hadn't agreed with Gary's decision not to put in a generator. So, she took matters into her own hands and had a 30kw Onan home standby generator installed and an automatic transfer switch put in. She figured that a bad winter storm might leave them stranded without power and unable to get to the cave. Smart gal. Gary had taken David over to Mason City and bought him a .45, a shotgun and a Garand rifle. It was all that they could find. The store had a bunch of that old Korean ammo in the 8-round Garand enbloc clips and David would just have to make do. David had test fired the rifle and except for having a Garand thumb, was reasonably satisfied. Nice rifle that Garand, but it was dangerous until you learned to move your thumb out of the way or ride the slide.

The weather channel was talking about a winter snowstorm. Not like that skiff of snow they'd had around the first of October, but a real storm that could drop a lot of snow. Sharon called and had the 5,500 gallon propane tank topped off and they made a trip to the grocery store in Charles City and laid in a few extra groceries. Rather than fool with trying to make bread, Sharon just bought several of those multi-loaf packages of frozen bread dough. Gary had bought a side of beef from one of his hundreds of cousins and they were pretty well set to ride out a winter storm. While they were in Charles City, Gary bought a 2-meter handheld radio, mostly on a whim. Ralph had given Gary a card with the frequencies they monitored in the cave when the radio shack was occupied and the frequencies of their hand held 2-meter radios. It's funny how things work out sometimes.

The storm hit like a hammer and during the night, the lights went out. The electrician who had installed the generator had put in a bell that rang in the house when the generator kicked in. Along about 5am that bell went off and Gary rolled out of bed to shut it off. He was wide-awake and decided to surf the net, but couldn't get a connection. He looked at his router and the light was red, indicating that the Internet connection was down. He went to the kitchen and put on a pot of coffee and then to the living room and turned on the TV. The wind outside must have been blowing 50-60mph. It was still dark, but the yard light was barely visible through the swirling snow. Before he had a chance to pick a channel, Sharon came into the living room carrying 2 cups of coffee.

The TV was tuned to KIMT, channel 3, and they had an EAS screen up.

"I wonder what that is all about?" Gary asked. "Surely they wouldn't broadcast an alert for a snowstorm."

This morning at 6:30am EST, an explosion took out the generating station in Niagara, New York, the announcer reported. That was followed by a series of explosions in Ohio, Illinois, Colorado, Washington and California. According to AP, this eventually started

bringing down the electrical grid around the US. AP hasn't said, but it is believed that the explosions were the work of terrorists.

"Guess it was a good idea that you put in that standby generator," Gary told Sharon.

The two of them sat transfixed watching the news. Eventually Amy and the kids came downstairs and Amy put on a fresh pot of coffee. The sun had come up but it was still pretty dark outside. Gary picked up the phone to call Ralph, but the phones were out, too. He figured that they were in good shape for the immediate future and didn't try the 2-meter handheld, which wasn't even turned on. As the morning wore on, it became evident that someone had orchestrated a well-coordinated attack on the US infrastructure. Surprisingly, no one was claiming credit for the attacks.

"Terrorists usually claim credit for their attacks," Gary told anyone listening, "That's part of their strategy. I wonder why no one has claimed credit. You don't suppose that this is the work of some homegrown terrorists, do you?"

"Why don't you get on that new hand held radio of yours and call Ralph up and see what he thinks?" Sharon asked.

"Oh, I forgot about the radio," Gary said. He picked it up and turned it on. Then, set it to what Ralph had said was the primary frequency.

"Hey Ralph, you there?" Gary called on the radio using very poor radio protocol.

"This is Ralph," Ralph came back, "Who wants to talk to me?"

"It's Gary," Gary said.

"Are you watching TV?" Ralph asked.

"Channel 3," Gary said.

"Turn to Austin and get back to me," Ralph said. "This is KR0DUZ clear."

"Uh, this is KD6GDQ clear," Gary broadcast. "That's Becky's call sign; I wonder what that is all about. Turn the TV to channel 6."

The Austin station was an affiliate of the Mason City station, so they should have had the same news. It turned out that they were broadcasting information about 5 minutes earlier than KIMT. More explosions had gone off, according to the Austin KAAL announcer. (I can guess that the call letters represent Austin-Albert Lee.) The entire electrical grid for the US was down. To make matters worse, the winter storm that was hitting the Midwest was a full out blizzard with whiteout conditions over most of northern Iowa and southern Minnesota.

Gary went around and made sure that they didn't have any extra electric lights burning. The Onan generator burned anywhere from 1.9-gallons of propane at a 25% load to 4.2-gallons at a 100% load. He wanted to stretch the 5,000-gallons of propane as far as possible. The genset had a built-in coolant heater and the optional battery heater, which was a good thing considering how cold it was outside.

On The Cheap – Chapter 21 – Getting Together

Gary picked up the 2-meter handheld.

“This is KD6GDQ calling KR0DUZ, come back,” he said.

“This is KR0DUZ,” a female voice replied. “This is Becky, TOM.”

“Ralph said to call him back after we watched channel 6,” Gary said.

“I’ll get him for you,” Becky said. “This is KR0DUZ standing by.”

“KD6GDQ standing by,” Gary said.

“What’s your situation over there?” Ralph asked.

“We have a full load of propane and the generator is running,” Gary replied.

“Are you folks ok on food?”

“10-4, just went to the store, over,” Gary acknowledged.

“Jim won’t be able to get you plowed out until the storm is over,” Ralph informed Gary.

“10-4, figured that, partner,” Gary replied.

“Can you get in touch with Derek and Damon?” Ralph asked.

“Negative.”

“Circle the wagons and get ready to move as soon as the storm clears,” Ralph advised.

“10-4, KD6GDQ clear,”

“KR0DUZ clear.

“What was that all about?” Sharon asked. “Circle the wagons?”

“I think that Ralph was trying to tell me to get armed up and take a defensive posture,” Gary explained. “Although, with this storm, I can’t see why we’d want to do that. There isn’t anyone moving in this blizzard.”

Maybe because Ralph was really frightened, this time, Gary. Why are you taking Prevacid? Gut still bothering you or has it settled down now the TSHTF? Still hurting? Hmm, maybe there’s more to come. When it rains, it pours, right? Gary had decided that until the snow let up, everyone was safe. Over in Charles City, David and Lorrie

didn't have a generator, but David put the frozen goods on their front porch to keep them frozen. In Mason City, Damon and his girlfriend didn't have power, but neither did they have much frozen food. They cooked it to preserve it. Down in Huxley, it wasn't snowing nearly as badly and Derek was able to get out. When Frances had died she'd left them Herb's old 4kw portable generator. Derek had the unit serviced and exercised it regularly. He was able to find some gas cans and buy some gas for the old generator. It was enough to run the refrigerator and the motor on the furnace, but not at the same time. He tried to call his Dad, but the phones were down. After Mary and he had seen what was going on around the country on TV, Derek began to load the Explorer in preparation for the trip to Floyd.

When the blizzard hit, Ralph and Lorraine had gathered up clothing, food, and firearms and headed over to Steve and Becky's. Ralph had ended up staying up all night and was watching CNN when TSHTF. He'd tried to reach Gary first by phone and then by radio, but apparently Gary didn't have his new radio turned on. The 6kw generator automatically powered up when the lights went out and Ralph held off firing up the big generator until it was needed. Ralph had been sitting in the comm. shack in the cave watching TV when Gary's radio call had finally come. Ralph also felt that there wouldn't probably be any trouble until the storm died down, but it never hurt to be cautious. Maybe that explained why he'd felt obligated to tell Gary to circle the wagons.

Iowa had plenty of blizzards and this one wasn't any worse than any of the others. However, the power outage changed a lot of things. The Floyd Town Council got together and arranged for a snowplow to clear highway 218 north of Floyd and the gravel road down to the Community Shelter. The snow was blowing in almost as fast as the road was being cleared and they ended up sending out small groups of cars filled to capacity with people. The buildings in the town acted as windbreaks after a fashion and although the snow kept falling, people were able to get around on foot. Floyd just isn't that big and a few people had 4-wheel drive SUV's allowing the city fathers to slowly evacuate the town.

The snowplow and SUV's ended up making dozens of round trips over the course of the day and the Community Shelter slowly began to fill. Ralph had kicked in the main generator when the first carloads of people had shown up and later, added in Ed's 40kw unit. Julie, Lorraine and Becky got the kitchen going and the coffee on and as members of the Ladies Auxiliaries from the churches showed up, the kitchen staff began to put together a meal. By nightfall, everyone from Floyd had made it to the shelter. At that time, no one expected that they would be there for more than a few days and most people only brought one or two changes of clothes.

With the kitchen started up and the influx of people, the temperature steadily rose in the cave. Ralph had learned a valuable lesson from the previous time when the shelter had been used and had several electrical space heaters. He didn't have as many as he wanted because of their electrical capacity, but the cave was up to an almost balmy 63° by evening. It might not have been as warm as a properly heated home, but with the power out, it was the warmest place out-of-town.

“KD6GDQ, this is KR0DUZ, come back,” the radio announced.

“This is KD6GDQ, go ahead,” Gary replied.

“TOM, this is Ralph. All the folks from Floyd have been moved out to the shelter because of the electrical outage, how are you doing?”

“Ralph, we’re snug as a bug.”

“10-4. Do you want to come over here?”

“Negative, we’ll ride it out here; it’s warmer than that cave.”

“10-4. Call me if anything changes. This frequency is monitored 24/7”

“10-4. KD6GDQ clear.”

“KR0DUZ clear.”

On the third day the storm had moved out of the area to the east and northern Iowa began to dig out. The REA had separated itself from the grid and was making repairs to some equipment before coming back online. David and Lorrie showed up from Charles City followed an hour later by Damon and his girlfriend. Then, about 3 hours after Damon arrived, Derek, Mary and the kids showed up. Gary got on the 2-meter radio and told Ralph that the family was all assembled and they were sitting tight for the moment. Ralph told Gary that as soon as the REA had power restored the folks from Floyd would probably be heading back to town. Obviously telephone service had not been restored either.

Power was going to be a long time being restored in places where they didn’t have local electrical service like an REA or a municipal power system. As one might have expected, every place that had a local source of power had detached itself from the regional grid and was bringing their system back online. Around the nation, some of the strikes had been against power plants like the one in Niagara Falls while in other instances the strike was against the electrical distribution system. And, as of this point, no one had laid claim as being responsible for the carefully orchestrated attacks. Speculation was running rampant on the cable channels like CNN, FOX and MSNBC about who was behind the attacks. The commentators were blaming everyone from al Qaeda to the Shining Path. Truth is stranger than fiction, but it would be a long time before anyone knew the truth.

The White House activated all of the National Guard units nationwide to deal with the situation. Efforts were being made to congregate people in school auditoriums and community centers and the military and guard units were bringing in portable power plants where needed. The storm was really hampering those efforts just where they

were most needed, too. After 9/11 the government had overseen the removal of a lot of the information that would aid terrorists from the Internet. Consequently, fellas like Gary couldn't get specific information to figure out which electrical systems might be up and which might be down.

One would have thought that the electrical system being down nationwide would have been the end of it. Those military units that weren't trying to help people had been assigned to protect other elements of the nation's infrastructure. Someone must have counted on that very typical behavior. The US was always closing the barn door after the horse was gone and this was no exception. Certain weapons don't need to be within 4' of a target to take it out. In fact, mere use of the weapons in and of itself is enough. This description generally applied to WMD's. "Weapons of mass destruction (WMD) – nuclear, biological, and chemical – in the possession of hostile states and terrorists represent one of the greatest security challenges facing the United States."

Even the so-called 'suitcase nukes' aren't exactly small. Neither do they deliver much of a blow. I'm not saying I'd want to be anywhere near one were it to go off, but maybe a mile away, underground, would be plenty secure. Some weapons are easily smuggled in. If you ever watched the short-lived TV series, 'The Grid', you know what I mean. Take some biological weapon and reproduce it under controlled conditions and you have a pretty handy WMD. There is a vaccine for the Ebola virus; did you know that?

While a vaccine for anthrax exists, it is only available to those who are at risk for anthrax exposure, such as the military. Generally, anthrax is treated with a course of antibiotics as early as possible after symptoms appear or before symptoms appear if exposure is suspected. If treated promptly, anthrax infection usually responds well to antibiotics; however, treatment provided in real-live circumstances is likely to be imperfect – the 2001 anthrax attacks resulted in a 45% fatality rate (5 deaths of 11 infected). However, the CDC lists a lot more than those two as possible bacteriological agents. Check out the categories, especially category C (Emerging infectious diseases such as Nipah virus and hantavirus). Scared yet? Read what it says about Category C virus at the bottom of the page. But wait, a virus needs warmth to spread right? So, it wouldn't do much good to spread them during the winter would it?

Well, there are always chemical WMD's. But they're messy and as dangerous as those viruses. How about something bulky, but relatively safe? Something of the explosive nature that you can whip up at home or in your garage? Won't do a lot of damage, but might be able to knock down a building.

"ANFO stands for Ammonium Nitrate / Fuel Oil, and describes a crude but effective explosive that is used by farmers to clear stumps and by the mining industry (because it is easy to pump in slurry form) to break up overburden rock and expose ore in open pit mining.

The formulation of ANFO is well known. Ammonium nitrate is a substance most commonly used as a fertilizer. When mixed with fuel oil (diesel fuel, kerosene, JP-1 jet fuel,

etc), it can be used as an improvised low yield explosive. Commercial explosives based on ANFO are also available. Because of the easy availability of its ingredients, ANFO is often used by terrorists for large bombs. ANFO was often used by the Provisional IRA, ETA, and Palestinian extremist groups in their bombing campaigns. It was also found in the Manila apartment which Ramzi Yousef occupied after an apartment fire led authorities to his apartment, which was a bomb-making factory and plotting center for Operation Bojinka.

So called 'fertilizer bombs' were made famous in America by their use in the Oklahoma City bombing (the bomb was composed of ammonium nitrate, an agricultural fertilizer, and nitromethane, a highly volatile motor-racing fuel) which maimed and killed hundreds of victims. However, that bomb was only remotely based on the traditional ANFO formula. It used a sophisticated triggering sequence and compressed oxygen to achieve a larger detonation than is possible using mundane means.

ANFO at standard temperature and pressure is classified as a low explosive. At extremely high temperatures and pressures, the primary oxidant undergoes a phase change that allows the material to become much more compressible. In this highly compressed state, ANFO is a high explosive.

No, not ANFO again! Yes, ANFO, again! You see, properly formulated ANFO as non-slurry is readily disguised. You can mix it up, bag it in a non-permeable bag and load the bags into fertilizer bags or most any kind of bags and stitch them shut. Then, if some LEO checks your vehicle and sees the stuff, he won't realize it is explosives. That's the theory at least. ANFO needs something fairly significant to set it off, unless it is created by diesel fuel mixing with a carload of fertilizer in a train wreck. In that case, people tip-toe around it for fear of setting it off. Stick a cap in it and light the fuse and kaboom. Better yet, stick the cap in some real explosives and stick them in the ANFO and, KA-BOOM. You shouldn't use ANFO, though; the squirrels don't like it although the terrorists do. (Only a PhD in sarcasm?)

On The Cheap – Chapter 22 – TSHTF, Again

So anyway, now that you have a few truckloads of Tidy Cat, what are you going to do with it? Won't do you much good to blow up electrical sub-stations, the power is out. Most of the critical portions of the infrastructure are under guard by the military or LEO's. There's a winter storm raging across the upper Midwest and moving east across Indiana, Ohio and Pennsylvania. How about we stir up a little hate and discontent, "Abdul"? We can take those truckloads of Tidy Cat to some place where we can play on the anger within America. Somewhere like a ghetto or a Jewish neighborhood or the barrio. Then we leave a hate letter of some kind where they're sure to find it and set off those explosives. After that we call up a TV station or a newspaper and make some inflammatory remarks. The news outlet will report the remarks even if they have some brains and edit them.

After that, some of those angry Americans will have a fit and start a riot, even in the middle of the winter. Say, maybe we'd better do it where it isn't snowing so that minority group can get out and 'play', right. Well, "Jamal", I don't know if that's a good idea, but hey, we might kill a few Americans, so let's do a test run on 3-4 cities. Ok? You get one guy and take a truck down to south central LA. I'll take a truck up to San Francisco and park it in the Tenderloin. I'll get "Ali" to drive a truck back to Chicago because the roads should be clear by the time he gets there. I'd like to do Detroit, too, but the weather doesn't permit. Well, let's get rolling, and praise Allah, or, something like that.

"KD6GDQ, this is KR0DUZ, are you listening?"

"KR0DUZ, this is KD6GDQ, I'm here."

"How are you folks doing over there?"

"We're fine, partner. How are the town folks doing?"

"Sent them all home. Have any ideas about who might be behind the power outage?"

"I do, but it will have to be face-to-face. And, I don't think you're going to believe me anyway."

"Got some conspiracy theory?"

"Face-to-face, partner. I'll have one of the boys drive me over if the roads are clear."

"I told you the town folks were gone. Come on over and I'll put on some coffee."

"10-4. KD6GDQ clear."

"KR0DUZ clear."

“Hi Derek, have any trouble getting up here from Huxley?” Ralph asked.

“No sir, the roads were fairly clear, but I’m not so certain we’ll be going back just yet,” Derek replied.

“What’s that all about TOM?” Ralph asked.

“I’ve been plotting all of the outages on a map based on the reports on TV,” Gary said. “There is something mighty peculiar about those outages.”

“What do you mean?”

“It would seem that whoever did it had an above average knowledge of our power system,” Gary explained. “I did a lot of research on the power grid after that outage back in the summer of 2004. The government has pulled one hell of a lot of the detailed information from the web.”

“Are you sure it was the government that took the data off the net?” Ralph asked.

“No, it could have been the power companies for all I know,” Gary admitted, “But either way, it’s not on the net. So the question becomes who could get that information and who would have a vested interest in seeing this country in trouble?”

“No...” Ralph said after a long pause, “I can’t believe it.”

“It’s the only thing that makes sense to me Ralph,” Gary said.

“But why?” Ralph asked. “There’s probably a whole bunch of people died behind the power going down.”

“I think that it might be the first part of a plan to stir up anger in this country,” Gary replied. “Won’t know for sure until the next phase happens.”

“What next phase?” Ralph asked.

“First you get people angry. Then you do something to trigger an event of some kind where people are fighting their neighbors,” Gary suggested. “Next you say that it’s more than you can handle and that you need help.”

Can you read through all of the double talk? That’s one nasty idea, but what good thinking person would do something like that? So, who said that they’re all good thinking people? Maybe power hungry and maybe they never heard of Yamamoto and what he said after Pearl Harbor. But you know don’t you? *I am afraid we have awakened a sleeping giant and filled him with a terrible resolve.* Only in this case the sleeping giant would not be the United States of America. And, while America frittered away its military and military assets, other countries were not doing the same. The solution to faltering

European economies had been to start another arms race like the one that preceded WW I. *Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.* George Santayana. *Never attribute to malice that which can be adequately explained by stupidity.* – Hanlon's Razor

We at Carnival Cruise Lines didn't forget that a lot of entertainers had promised to leave the country if George W. Bush became President. With that in mind, we have a Special Offer for those who want to keep their promise!

Attention: Would Alec Baldwin, Rosie O'Donnell, Cher, Phil Donahue, David Geppin, Barbara Streisand, Pierre Salinger, and anyone else who made that promise, please report to Florida for the sailing of the Funship Cruise, "Elation", which has been commissioned to take you to your new homes outside of the USA.

The Florida Supreme Court will sponsor a Farewell Parade in your honor through Palm Beach, Broward, and Miami-Dade counties prior to your cruise. Please pack for an extended stay...at least four years and you should consider the possibility of eight years.

Your captain - Bill Clinton

Your cruise director - Al Gore

Your recreation director - Monica Lewinsky

Your lifeguard and swimming instruction supervisor – Sen. Ted Kennedy. Sen. Kennedy will also be teaching a course in emergency procedures.

Your spiritual advisor and marriage counselor – Rev. Jesse Jackson.

If you've any questions about making arrangements for your homes, friends and loved ones, please direct your comments to Senator Hillary Clinton. Her village can raise your children while you're gone, and she can watch over all your money and your furnishings until you return.

Bon Voyage! (I used to have a website of my own with a lot of quotes and jokes on it. Pierre Salinger died recently, but I left him in.)

Gary was obviously suggesting that the government was behind the bombing, or so Ralph thought. Ralph remembered their conversation about finding some excuse to bring the UN in. His exact words had been, "Say we had another terrorist attack that had a country wide effect. Those liberals in Washington would probably end up screaming for help and invite the UN in or not resist an offer of help." Apparently TOM had picked up that ball and run with it. There was no use crying about it and TOM could be wrong. On the other hand, maybe he should call Walton Feed or one of the other suppliers and fill in for the canned goods they'd used. It might not hurt to top off the propane tanks while he was at it. Ralph Perkins was a careful man and just because someone's theory came out of left field didn't make it wrong.

“Derek,” Gary said after they got home, “It doesn’t make much sense for you to return to Huxley until the power is back on. Do you have any objections to staying beyond that until we see how this thing is going to play out?”

“We hate to be a burden, Dad, but we can stay,” Derek replied. “I don’t quite know what I’ll tell my employer, but you’ll think of something.”

“I suppose I could have a ‘heart attack’ at the appropriate moment,” Gary laughed.

“What about me?” Damon asked.

“Are you really doing all that much insulation installation in the winter, Damon?” Gary asked.

“None at all actually,” Damon admitted. “You want us to stay?”

“Yes. What the hell, the freezer is full of meat and we have lights and heat. You don’t really have any reasons to go back to Mason City do you?” Gary commented.

“No. Ok, we’ll stay until Derek leaves,” Damon said.

“We’re going back to Charles City Daddy as soon as the lights are on,” Lorrie said.

“I think that they’re on now Lorrie, call Midamerican (see note) and find out,” Gary suggested.

A few minutes later Lorrie announced that the lights were on in Charles City and they were going home.

“Get yourselves some meat out of the freezer,” Sharon advised. “You don’t know what will be available at Hy-Vee.”

“David, if anything goes down, you get Lorrie and Jeffrey and get your fannies over here real quick,” Gary said. “Go straight to the Community Shelter because that’s where we’ll be.”

David had to make an awful adjustment when he started a locksmithing business. He went to each auto dealer and offered each a substantially discounted rate for spare keys. With the new ignition locking systems, they had been relying on a company in Waterloo to cut their replacement keys. David offered them faster service and a better price. If David had tried to make a living depending solely on door locks, they would have starved to death.

The next day Gary called Ralph to make sure he’d be home and asked Derek to drive him over.

“Hey Ralph, given any thought to what I was suggesting yesterday?” Gary asked.

“I got on the phone TOM and ordered replacement supplies for what we used up during the outage,” Ralph replied. “I’ll have to admit that what you suggest is far-fetched. But, it’s just far-fetched enough to be true.”

“I have a 50-50 chance of being right, partner,” Gary said.

“Do you ever hear from your friends Ron or Clarence?” Ralph asked.

“Not lately, no,” Gary replied. “They’ll both be ok. At least I hope so. Ronald has a regular arsenal at his disposal and I’m pretty sure he’s gotten accustomed to keeping supplies on hand. He was using physician’s samples the same as I was because his heart meds were so expensive. I’m not sure about Clarence because I haven’t heard and he wasn’t into physician’s samples. You know the drug companies cut way down on physician’s samples after Dubya got those drug card things back in 2004-5. I never signed up for one because I couldn’t understand the entire BS and I’d use up the \$600 in one month. I used to set up doctors’ appointments that overlapped in California and made out pretty good on certain drugs.”

“What about now?” Ralph asked.

“I buy from Canada, the same as everyone else and try to get physician’s samples when I can,” Gary laughed. “But it seems that the doctors give a lot of their samples to the Floyd Community Shelter.”

“Just the outdated stuff,” Ralph pointed out.

“So? I never let an expired label bother me, Ralph,” Gary said. “Certain antibiotics and certain drugs like epinephrine have to be current, but 90% of all drugs are good for up to 10 years.”

Authors Notes: Midamerican Energy Company supplies all of the natural gas and electricity for that area of Iowa. I took some liberties with the facts concerning the REA. Rural Electrification Associations were the original source of a lot of the electricity in Iowa. In On The Cheap, I’m going to use that liberty. Wind power, BTW, is big in Iowa; most of the state is zone 3 or 4. The last I knew, phone service was supplied by Northwestern Bell, a subsidiary of US West, which is now known as Qwest.

I was hinting real loud earlier on when Gary and Ralph were visiting trying to indicate where this story was going. FT and I aren’t in competition here. It might be amusing/interesting to see how we approach a similar scenario. We might be ‘brothers’ as one person put it, but we have different styles.

On The Cheap – Chapter 23 – Ka-Boom

Ralph was moving the shipment of replacement food he'd ordered to the cave. He was nearly finished when a flushed Becky came to him and said, "Daddy, you'd better come inside and watch the TV news. There's more trouble."

The fellas that were supposed to go to Chicago only got to St. Louis. But, St. Louis was a perfect target as far as they were concerned. The city is about 50-50 white-black with a smattering of other races tossed in. These tests runs were going to attack blacks and gays. It would be perfect for the liberals in Washington, even if those folks who came under attack didn't react and start trouble. Then, if that worked, they might go for some of those conservative Christians that Bush had depended upon so much to get elected and re-elected. America is the great melting pot and it was time to stir the soup. LA went up first, followed in a short time by the Tenderloin District. Then the bomb went off in St. Louis.

KIMT-TV has just learned that a third bomb went off in St. Louis, Missouri, the announcer read from the paper he'd been handed. Ralph was just settling into a chair.

The first bomb detonated at 8:05am Pacific in the residential area south of downtown Los Angeles referred to as Watts or sometimes South Central. The second bomb, which detonated at 8:13am Pacific, was located in the area of San Francisco known as the Tenderloin District. The latest bomb exploded at 10:22 Central in St. Louis. We return to our regular programming at this time. Stay tuned for further updates.

Phone service had finally been restored and Ralph grabbed a phone to call Gary.

"TOM, Ralph. Did you catch the news?" Ralph asked.

"Yeah, we're already loading the pickup," Gary said. "We'll be there shortly."

"Aren't you jumping the gun a little, TOM?" Ralph asked. "Shouldn't we wait to see how this thing plays out?"

"As far as I'm concerned, they've started phase 2," Gary replied. "It doesn't matter how these 3 events play out, Ralph. We've got some planning to do and some preparations to make. I'll explain when we get there. How about you fire up the space heaters in the cave?"

Ralph couldn't imagine, for the life of him, what kind of planning and preparations were in order. Maybe TOM had been on base with his speculation, but what now? Ralph thought about these things from time to time, but that was all that Gary did was sit around and think about 'What if's'. Ralph turned on the space heaters as he continued to haul the food order to the cave. About a ½ hour later, Gary and his family showed up and it looked like they were planning to stay. Becky went down to the cave and got some coffee going and went back upstairs.

“What’s with TOM?” Becky asked Sharon.

“Becky, I wish I knew,” Sharon replied. “He’s off on one of his tangents and sees a boogie man behind every bush.” (small “B”)

“What’s the urgency?” Ralph asked Gary when they’d settled in the comm. shack.

“Ralph, I’ve been thinking,” Gary started. “Let’s say that this is just the beginning of a government orchestrated campaign to have an excuse to call in the UN. From what I’ve seen on the news, Europe is in the middle of an arms race like before WW I. So, if the UN does come in, they are going to be pretty hard to handle. Now, I’d expect that the government would get awfully interested in disarming America before that happens. The ATF has been here once and I personally believe they’ll be back again.”

“Next time,” he continued, “They’re going to tear this cave apart looking for those weapons. Now, you have an opportunity, if you work fast, to get a step ahead of them. The first thing I would do is to pile some rock in the branch that goes to the big sinkhole near the sinkhole and about ½ way to the sinkhole. Then, I’d get the Press over here and spin them a yarn how that tunnel collapsed. Maybe I’d even call in KIMT-TV. You know, make it a media event. You could lament that a mile of that branch had collapsed.”

“What for?” Ralph asked.

“Bear with me, I’ll get there,” Gary said. “That tunnel was the only possible exit from the cave beside the main entrance in the basement of Steve and Becky’s house. Now, what I’d do next would be to actually destroy the entrance under the house. Chalk that up to a propane gas explosion and blame it on me and my family. You could say that we got all worried about the state of affairs in the country and had moved into the cave.”

“I don’t know about that one, TOM,” Ralph said. “If we did that, there would only be the large sinkhole entrance, after we moved out those dummy rock piles. How about we burn down the house, while we’re at it?”

Ralph was being snide, but it didn’t pay to be snide around a guy like Gary. It gave Gary an even better idea, at least to him.

“Hey, I like that idea better,” Gary said. “Burning down the house and leaving a pile of rubble in the basement would really be convincing and we wouldn’t have to blow up the main entrance.”

“I wasn’t serious,” Ralph snapped.

“I am,” Gary countered.

The debate (argument) continued for some time. Ralph could see the wisdom in Gary's suggestion, but you didn't just burn down a home to hide a cave. TOM must have taken a crazy pill that morning! Actually, Gary had been working on the plan with the boys for several days. The idea was that if things went the way he thought they were going to, they could start moving in the families from Floyd a few at a time. Ralph could keep the media involved and shine them into writing a series of articles about how the residents of Floyd, concerned over the state of the nation and the loss of their Community Shelter were fleeing the area. Better still, he could effectively erase the Ott family from the face of the earth.

The only downside Gary could see was that they would lose their incomes. If they were dead, both pensions would dry up and the Trust Fund would just sit there until the state of Iowa escheated the money or Sarah and Margo sued to get the remainder of their Grandfather's money. That would never do, not in a million years. No, the Ott family would have to stay alive, but so far as the rest of the plan went, it seemed like a really good idea. Ralph was firmly opposed to the plan.

It's hard to say how it all came about, but by the first of the year, the plan was taking on a life of its own. Failing to convince Ralph, Gary had turned to Becky and Steve. Steve didn't think much of the idea, but Becky was enchanted. That old farmhouse didn't have very good insulation and Becky had wanted a new home for a long time. And, the more that she thought about Gary's plan, the better she liked it. She must have really worked Steve over because eventually he came around to accepting the idea. They'd been having trouble with the old propane furnace anyway and the stage was set already. The plumber had made some repairs in October but warned them that the furnace needed to be replaced.

Propane is heavier than air and pools. A propane leak would fill the basement and then when the level reached the pilot lights on either the furnace or the hot water heater an explosion was inevitable. The old farmhouse was insured for full replacement value, too. At the minimum, Steve and Becky would be involved in a conspiracy to commit arson and fraud if they were anyway involved in the affair. But, it was such an interesting idea...

Becky and Steve gave tacit approval to the plan to block the branch that led to the big sinkhole. They made it plain to Ralph that they couldn't be involved in any scheme to blow up their home and flatly rejected that plan. However, Ralph noticed that Becky began to haul mementos and anything with any sentimental value over to their house. One day when he was at their house, he noticed that the old farmhouse was being carefully stripped with anything that was irreplaceable either ending up in the cave or at his house. All the while, Becky and Steve steadfastly maintained their opposition to Gary's plan.

There had been more explosions around the US, always using ANFO, the weapon preferred by terrorists, and always involving some identifiable group. Someone was work-

ing overtime to create a problem in the US that would require the US to request help from a third party.

It was cold hard work piling the rocks to create the impression that the branch to the large sinkhole had caved in. By March, the work was completed and Ralph started the media show. Meanwhile, Derek and Mary had put their home on the market and sold it. They bought a home in Floyd and enrolled Elizabeth in the school system. Derek found a job in Charles City. Amy was now working for the state of Iowa in an office in Mason City.

Ralph had tracked down Smith at Holiday Lake and had cleaned out his inventory of exotic weapons plus his ordered H&K rifles and ammunition, or at least all that he was willing to sell and Ralph could afford. Although Gary could have afforded more weapons, he restrained himself and only bought replacement ammunition for what they used up on the range. Gary turned 68 on March 23, 2011, but other than a cake and ice cream, they didn't celebrate. He'd almost forgotten Sharon's 64th birthday on February 12th, but Mary had reminded him and he got her a nice card and cake. March 23, 2011 was a Wednesday. That evening while the Ott family was eating ice cream and cake, Steve, Becky and the kids were over to Ralph and Lorraine's for dinner. Just after 7, Steve and Becky's house exploded and burst into flames. By the time the Fire Department got there, the house was beyond saving. The state sent in arson investigators from Des Moines and they determined that a part in the old propane furnace had failed and that propane had leaked and eventually exploded.

Even before the arson investigators were on scene, Jim was out to the farmstead, blasting a hole for a new basement. By the time the insurance company had settled the claim, the new home was almost finished. The investigators officially ruled that the explosion an accident. Julie had been in Floyd that evening fixing dinner for old Doc Thompson, by the way. It was a real shame about that house. Fortunately no one had been injured and Robbie had been outside, probably in the barn. When you're in a hurry, a new home can be erected quickly, especially with several people pitching in to help. Damon even got some business for his company insulating the new home and David did the locks.

With the loss of the Community Shelter, the Floyd Town Council voted to suspend the annual dole for supplies. Unfortunately, the vote had come too late; they had already coughed up \$2,500 for 2011. There was an air of uncertainty in Floyd, given the national situation. The President had, by the end of April, called for UN assistance to quell the unrest in the US. Congress had voted to approve the President's plan; it was a Senate Resolution that was endorsed by the House. As UN troops started to arrive on US soil for the first time, the residents of Floyd began to leave Floyd. It was the strangest thing you could ever imagine, almost as if aliens had snatched them.

He's dead Jim, Doc McCoy said for the 101st time.

It was an early spring in 2011 and the gardens went in early. The US armed forces had been ordered to cooperate with the UN Peacekeepers, but there was unrest among the ranks. The electrical grid had finally been restored around the US; it was almost as if someone had timed the event to coincide with the arrival of the UN. Russia refused to supply troops as UN peacekeepers for some strange reason, but Germany and France were there in force along with 3-4 dozen smaller countries.

And, with the UN's appearance, those ANFO bombings had stopped. However, there were all kinds of tension around the country. Fingers were being pointed in a dozen different directions. The minorities were blaming whites in general and supremacist groups in particular. The Moral Majority was casting dispersion about the liberals and blaming them for the bombings of the Baptist Churches. "Abdul", "Jamal" and "Ali" and their cohorts were back in Langley, Virginia.

The UN's arrival was orderly at first. Under orders to assist, the US armed forces had made bases available for the transport planes and berths available at various ports. However! With the downsizing of the armed forces the military had amassed a sizable quantity of excess weapons and munitions. When UN inspectors went to check on those weapons they found that the weapons had disappeared. It was Iraq, all over again. You may recall that President George W. Bush had invaded Iraq beginning March 20, 2003. After a 3-week campaign, the War was won and in May of 2003, Bush had given that speech from the aircraft carrier. The search for the weapons of mass destruction had proven to be fruitless, but the insurgents didn't seem to have any trouble getting their hands on rockets, mortars, AK's, ammo, etc. All kinds of surplus M416's, magazines, ammo, M203's, grenades, etc., etc., etc. were missing.

Redistributed might be a better word than missing. They weren't missing; militia groups all over the country knew exactly where they were. And, the US military reported that AWOL's and Desertions were at an unprecedented level. Yep, there are infinite possibilities. But, with the power restored and the country now secure from the terrorists, the sheeple were happy and went about their business. The Peacekeepers slowly spread out over the country, securing it from further trouble. There was some resistance, to be sure, but mostly people were making plans and biding their time, just like it had been in Iraq.

On The Cheap – Chapter 24 – Snip, Snip

Gary wears his hair in a butch haircut. He'd noticed over the years that even a butch was a matter where the barber seemed to snip here and snip there. Now, if he'd been giving the haircut, he'd have just put on an attachment and buzzed the whole thing and then removed the attachment and buzzed the sides. It would have been a quick and dirty haircut. But, barbers are proud of their work and they took their time. Must be those militia groups had some barbers as members, because, that's what they were doing to the UN, taking a snip here and a snip there.

All kinds of interesting things were going on in east north central Iowa. Apparently some of the farm wives in the area were lending Becky, Lorraine and Julie a hand, because they had plenty of help growing and harvesting the garden, which, by the way, had increased to 10 acres. Apparently; but you know the real story, right? It was those ladies with the Church Auxiliaries and no one was the wiser. It was a real shame how Floyd had seemed to dry up. No one was certain where the people had moved to, but it couldn't have been far, they still showed up at their jobs in Charles City and Mason City. It was really strange to the casual observer.

It had taken as long to remove the rocks blocking the tunnel to the large sinkhole, as it had to put them in initially. Then, they had to maintain the illusion that the tunnel was blocked so they crafted a door and mounted Styrofoam rocks on the exterior. They looked like rocks from a distance and you really couldn't get too close because of that grate. Ralph had taken a spray can of red paint and painted 'Collapsed' right over the warning on that sign to enhance the illusion. That was what this whole thing was about, illusion so far as the residents of Floyd were concerned. When someone asked them where they'd moved to their replies were always vague and non-committal. Derek and Mary had bought a home in Floyd, and were one of the few families remaining. Or, so it seemed. In actuality, many of the residents of Floyd were in town frequently, but they made it a point to stay out of sight. The UN had searched the small town thoroughly and hadn't found a single soul and after a while discontinued the patrols. When they were reasonably certain that Floyd was off the UN's radar, many of the resident's returned home. That had taken most of the summer to play out.

Rather than distribute the prior years canned food to the needy, the residents consumed it. This gave them several thousand jars to refill and another couple of jar drives produced an additional ~2,000 quart jars. The quantity was grossly insufficient, given a 10-acre garden and they had to all chip in and buy more jars. Those 10-acres of garden produced a bumper crop and if they had to stay in the cave, they could hold out for a very long time. The entire thing almost came down around their ears a few times when the UN did unannounced pass through checks on the town. Now, if the UN troopers had only gotten off their behinds and checked more carefully, they would have gotten an unexpected reception. Fortunately for the residents of the community, the Germans and French were assigned to the larger cities and the UN forces out in the sticks were ill trained and poorly disciplined troops from smaller nations.

The open resistance to the presence of the UN forces had commenced the 4th of July 2011. On that date, several militia groups around the country made raids on UN camps. At that time, the UN wasn't even up to full strength yet and the raids were highly successful. This, in turn, forced the UN to concentrate troops in several unlikely places. The militia groups had been preparing for weeks and months in anticipation of a move like this and when highly trained US active duty troops had shown up with weapons and offered additional training, the militias became highly skilled. It was all of those AWOL troops and Deserters who did the training. And, they were AWOL and Deserters in name only; some of those American Generals and Admirals didn't exactly agree with the President and Congress. Apparently, they couldn't reconcile their oath to Protect and Defend the Constitution with what was happening in the country.

"I don't know why I ever spent so much money on firearms and ammo," Ralph chuckled. "Darned near wiped out my savings. Now, the military advisors are supplying us with all of the weapons we can use."

"Ralph, we didn't know that would happen when we bought those guns," Gary responded. "Besides, they're supplying us with things we would have played hell getting anywhere from anyone. I thought that the US only had about 10,000 of the M203's, for example. If they've distributed weapons in the same proportions as we're getting, they must have had one hell of a lot more than that or they didn't keep any for themselves."

"TOM, the number you keep referring to is the number of M203's that the Marine Corps has," Ralph corrected. "The Army probably had one or two of the M203's, too."

"Well, I suppose so," Gary agreed. "I got mine and that's all that concerns me."

"Why do YOU need a M203?" Ralph asked. "I don't think you'll be getting into combat any time in this lifetime."

"Probably not, Ralph," Gary agreed, "But it sure does make that M16A3 look mean. You were training some of those folks from Floyd at the range at one time, how big of a militia unit do we have?"

"It's not all that big, maybe 60-70 guys," Ralph replied, "But they're armed to the teeth and can use everything they've got."

"We got any of those M-136 AT-4 rockets?" Gary asked.

"TOM, we have a little of everything," Ralph said, "Including the AT-4's, a few LAW rockets and a wide assortment of mines. What do you have in mind?"

"What would it take to get those Blue Helmeted ragheads to pay a visit to Floyd so we could ambush them?" Gary asked.

"That part is easy," Ralph said, "But do we really want to attract attention to Floyd?"

“We’d ambush them on the way,” Gary countered.

“In that case, we could drop a hint to the Sheriff’s office that there were some unsavory types holed up in Floyd,” Ralph suggested. “The Sheriff, in case you haven’t noticed, doesn’t like to get his people involved in harassing what could turn out to be militia types. He’d probably pass the information to the UN Liaison Officer.”

“Where would they be coming from?” Gary asked.

“Hard to say,” Ralph admitted. “The best bet would be Waterloo. It’s a lot closer than Ames and Des Moines.”

“There’s that spot about half way between Charles City and the Floyd turnoff that would make an idea ambush site,” Gary suggested.

“I’ll have someone check it out,” Ralph said. “If they think they can make it work, I’ll go ahead and set it up and get word to the Sheriff’s office.”

Ralph’s men had a pretty good idea what spot TOM was talking about and they checked the location out thoroughly. They could lay down overlapping fields of fire and unless the UN had armor, they could defeat anything that was thrown at them. The UN contingent in Waterloo was a group of Pakistanis, ragheads, as far as Gary was concerned. They would only dare use this ambush spot a single time, however. The UN people wouldn’t be dumb enough to fall for the same scam twice. So, while they were at it, they checked out the road between Charles City and Nashua. There were several very good ambush sites on that road and they decided to recommend one of them in preference to the site between Charles City and Floyd. They could always use that site at a later date.

Why Floyd residents and not the residents of Charles City, you may wonder? Charles City had their own militia group, but the Sheriff and some of his Deputies controlled it. The Sheriff was biding his time, and trying to establish a good working relationship with those ragheads. The population of Charles City was around 7,200 and the Sheriff could field a sizable force, maybe 6-700. Unfortunately the military had only a limited supply of weapons and they’d come to Charles City from the west, Ft. Dodge or somewhere like that. By the time they’d gotten out of Floyd, they’d given up a lot of their arms to Ralph’s militia group. This had generated a little resentment from the Floyd County Sheriff and Ralph couldn’t contact him directly to plant the misinformation. That was why Ralph was going to ‘get word to the Sheriff’s office’.

The Charles City Police Department – 13 full-time officers and 7 reserve officers – is under the direction of Police Chief Jim Zirbel. The Police Department can be reached in an emergency by dialing 911. For other questions, call (641) 228-3366.

The Floyd County Sheriff's Department and County Jail are under the direction of Sheriff Rick Lynch, and are located on the fourth floor of the Floyd County Courthouse at 101

Main Street. In case of emergency, dial 911, otherwise the Sheriff's department can be reached at (641) 228-1821.

Rick had been defeated in the 2004 election by Russ Bornstein and though Russ had an impressive resume, he was a bit short on being liked over in Floyd. He'd sure kept track of all his accomplishments, though. Was there anything the guy hadn't done? Maybe he needed to borrow Ron's cape, right Fleataxi? Anyway, some of the folks in Charles City kind of looked down their noses at the people over in Floyd. Word was that they'd thought it served the residents of Floyd right that they'd lost their Community Shelter to a cave in an explosion. Now, Russ had turned a deaf ear to the possibility of automatic weapons when those terrorists had been killed, but all the thanks he got was those folks over in Floyd ripping off arms his militia needed.

So, when Gary and Ralph hatched that plan to ambush the UN troops, the only part the Sheriff would play in the drama was dupe. Ralph sort of figured that the UN would end up blaming old Russ for the ambush anyway and that suited him just fine. Now if you were from Palmdale, California it would be easy for you to understand the intercity rivalry. Lancaster and Palmdale absolutely, positively did not get along. Palmdale had always been Lancaster's poor neighbor until the 1990's when the building boom hit and Palmdale became as big as Lancaster, but that's another story.

Besides that area of Iowa has a distinguishing feature, or did a long time ago. Most of the small towns were either predominately Protestant or predominately Catholic. In Charles City, even the Methodists couldn't get along and before the tornado in 1968 had 2 separate churches. But then, that tornado had changed a lot of things in Charles City. Back to the present...

"If we hit them down here around Midway," Ralph said, "They won't know if it was us or the militia from Nashua or the militia from Charles City. I figure that they'll put the blame on the Sheriff anyway, so the odds are they'll suspect the Charles City militia."

"I like it," Gary said, "What can I do to help?"

"Give us back the M203 for starters," Ralph suggested, "We don't have enough to go around."

"All right, all right," Gary crabbled, "Anything else?"

"You any good at praying?" Ralph asked.

"Not my strong suit," Gary admitted.

"Guess not then," Ralph said. "I have someone drop the hint on the Sheriff and we'll set up and be waiting for them."

Midway is a spot on the road about midway between Charles City and Nashua. You can get the town up on MapQuest, but the star on their map is bigger than the town. There's a bridge that crosses the Cedar River and a few homes. Nice spot for an ambush, however. An anonymous call from a pay phone in Charles City to the Sheriff's office put the plan in motion. The Floyd people had been drifting down towards Midway all morning and hadn't been observed. They set up on both sides of the intersection and waited. About 2 hours later a convoy of M-113 personnel carriers appeared on the horizon. Pakistan had about 850 of the American built M-113's and they'd brought them on this UN mission hoping that they'd be able to upgrade them. The M-113 is lightly armored. Very lightly armored, the crew and engine compartments of the M113s are protected only up to 7.62mm AP rounds. By now, the US was using the A3 variant and Stryker, but Pakistan had sent their older A1 versions.

Twenty-four members of the Floyd militia were strung out along highway 218 armed with an assortment of AT-4s and LAWs. The remainder was armed with M16s, M416s and AK-47s. When the first vehicle passed the northern most man, he had an AT-4, he fired his rocket. The range was about 100'; an AT-4 rocket will penetrate 400mm of rolled homogenous steel armor. Those armed with the lesser LAW's could only penetrate 300 millimeters of rolled homogeneous steel armor, but that was more than enough. In a matter of moments, all 12 of the M-113's had been disabled. It should be noted that the M-113 is a tracked vehicle, but they are capable of high-speed operation on improved roads and highways. Some of the Pakistani soldiers managed to clear the vehicles, but they were cut down by a murderous fusillade of 5.56 and 7.62mm caliber fire. Pakistan was now short 12 M-113's and 156 personnel.

The members of the Floyd militia gathered what arms and munitions were salvageable and headed west on country roads rather than returning to Floyd via Charles City.

"How'd it go?" Gary asked Jim.

"I like ambushes," Jim replied, "You kill most of them in their vehicles and cut the rest down as they exit. We only took a smattering of return fire and the worst that happened was a couple of our guys getting clipped by a stray Pakistani round. Flesh wounds that Doc patched up on the way back and we won't even have to get the doctors in Charles City involved. Gives us total deniability."

"Pick up many weapons?" Ralph asked.

"A few, but they were shot up and there probably aren't more than a couple of dozen we can salvage," Jim replied. "We stripped the bodies of anything useful."

"Well, if my pal Fleataxi were here, he'd say, 'I love it when a plan comes together'," Gary laughed.

On The Cheap – Chapter 25 – The Germans

While the US had been downsizing and had stopped development of most new weapons systems, the Europeans, led by Germany and France, had been doing just the opposite. Germany's new Leopard III tanks were every bit the match for the latest generation Abrams. Their Fuchs personnel carrier was of a new generation, too. This wasn't the European military of the turn of the 21st century any longer. You could still take out one of those tanks with a TOW missile, but forget about using an AT-4 against one, you couldn't even damage the tracks.

Sweden had built the JAS-39 fighters and they were very agile. Although they had orders running to about 2014, the Swedes had developed, tested and were now fielding a JAS-45 fighter that had all of the agility of the JAS-39, the stealth characteristics of the F-22 Raptor and more. The aircraft used all of the latest generation American missiles, too. That Eurofighter 2000 was every bit the match of some of the US's older aircraft. It didn't really matter what system you were talking about, the Europeans could match, and in many cases exceeded the capacity of the US military. And that was on the ground and in the air. This hadn't been tested yet because the US military was putting up a good front, appearing to accommodate the UN forces.

It was well known that the UN wanted to disarm the American public and had for years. Gee, I wonder why? Personal ownership of firearms was an institution in the US and the Democrats had also been trying to disarm the public for years. Hey, who goes shooting wearing a sports coat besides John Kerry? Kerry changed his mind so often that even Heinz-Kerry couldn't keep up with him. George Bush said he wasn't worried about Osama bin Laden but that didn't mean he hadn't been concerned about terrorists. Back in 2004 the candidates had been so busy slinging mud at each other the public had never really found out what their positions were. Gar-Bear had voted Republican, why change at that late date? His rule was, when in doubt...

In response to the ambush of the 12 M-113's near Midway, Iowa the UN Area Commander replaced the Pakistanis with a force of German armor and mechanized infantry. The Sheriff was able to prove that he wasn't involved in the scheme and he got out of trouble by the skin on his teeth. But he suspected that the Floyd militia was behind the attack and the resentment he felt towards them grew. This concerned Ralph and Gary and they sat down to discuss what they could do to get the Sheriff to back off.

"Excluding our personal weapons," Gary asked, "How many excess military-type weapons do we have?"

"Maybe 200, give or take," Ralph replied.

"And, if we included our personal weapons, how many extra would we have?" Gary continued.

"Closer to 300, TOM," Ralph allowed.

“That many, huh?” Gary said. “I didn’t realize that we had 100 personal military-type weapons.”

“We went a little bit overboard on this preparedness thing, TOM,” Ralph explained. “I suppose we planned on needing to arm the militia ourselves.”

“I don’t much care for that Sheriff, but we need him on our side, Ralph,” Gary ventured. “I suggest that we give him those 300 extra weapons so he can properly arm that militia he has over in Charles City. We’re all on the same side here.”

Similar discussions were probably going on all over the country. The military hadn’t been all that inquisitive about what people already had when they began passing out the surplus arms and munitions. Having had a taste of life under the UN and having tested the ability of the UN forces to resist an onslaught by the Patriotic US Militias, the country was undergoing some fundamental changes. The liberals still weren’t convinced that bringing in the UN had been the wrong thing to do, but even some of them began to defect. Maybe Fleataxi had been right about the difference between a NY liberal and a NY conservative was whether or not he or she had been mugged.

Out in the Heartland, the UN was having a lot more trouble than they’d ever expected. Maybe there is just something about a farmer and the people who live around farmers that explained it, but who could say. Gary had moved off the farm in November of 1952, never to return, but at heart, he was still a farmer. Anyway, Ralph thought it over and they ended up sorting out about 300 weapons and a portion of their munitions to give to the Floyd County Sheriff for his militia. It was the difference between day and night and the Sheriff, in short order became their greatest ally. BUT, they weren’t fools and as far as the Sheriff knew, the cave was inaccessible. Why did Floyd County need a Sheriff who was a SCUBA expert? Admittedly there was the Cedar River, but the nearest real lake was 40 miles away. (Clear Lake, which wasn’t all that clear.)

The Germans resumed regular patrols of the area and everyone ended up moving back to the cave. Then, they seized the voter registration records and went looking for people, mostly males in the 18-45 age group. It only took the arrest of a single individual to get the residents of Floyd to go way underground, literally. Of course, when all of the Floyd residents began disappearing from their jobs in Charles City, the Sheriff put 2 and 2 together and assumed that they’d somehow managed to reopen that Community Shelter. The man kept his mouth shut about his suspicions. The Germans eventually released the individual when he put on an act that convinced them that he was a limp wristed gay who was afraid of firearms and as liberal as they come. Great acting job! Or maybe, they let him go because his name was Schmidt and they thought he was a Kamerad. Or maybe, they just found him disgusting. Bad move guys; Herr Schmidt was a squad leader with the Floyd militia. Pretty good actor, though.

German soldiers aren’t slouches, according to Derek, and if they appeared to be during the Second World War, it was probably attributable to their having a maniac in charge

and a severe supply shortage. If Hitler had only waited until 43 or 44 to start that war, we might all be speaking German and Japan might have never attacked Pearl Harbor. There are infinite possibilities and they have a name. It's called Chaos Theory. It is way over my head, but Derek understands it.

Now, maybe those AT-4s couldn't take out a Leopard III tank, but a Fuchs II was a different matter. They might be upgraded, but they weren't tanks. The problem with the Germans turned out to be that they were anal-retentive. You could set your wristwatch from the schedule they kept. So, the Charles City militia and the Floyd militia decided to have a joint operation.

"I don't want the UN people to be able to tie any more phone calls to my office," Russ Bornstein insisted.

"Hell, Sheriff, we'll just call them direct instead of calling your office," Ralph laughed.

"You got me in all kinds of trouble with that call," Bornstein whined.

"Look at it this way Sheriff," Gary said, "If we make the call, you can tell the UN people it was probably the same person who called you. That way, you won't have to lie."

"Where are we going to hit them this time?" Bornstein asked.

"Ralph, what do you think, hit them at the place I picked out or save it for later?" Gary asked.

"TOM, that's a little too close to home to suit me, why don't we hit them at the curve on the north side of Plainfield?" Ralph suggested.

"Doesn't make any difference to me, Ralph," Gary replied. "There isn't much cover in that area, though."

"Then they won't be expecting an attack, will they," Ralph grinned. "Sheriff, when are they due in Charles City again?"

"Day after tomorrow at noon on the dot," Bornstein reported.

"Well, they'll be going through Nashua first and we don't have time to gather much intel, so maybe we'd better get people down to Plainfield tonight and start digging fighting positions," Ralph responded. "That way, we'll be waiting for them when they leave Plainfield."

"What are we going to do if they show up with tanks?" Bornstein asked.

The Leopard III (actually the 2A7+) was based on the Strv 122 and the Leopard 2A6. Early in 1998 the Swedish Army took delivery of the first of 120 brand new Leopard 2

MBTs, based on the German Leopard 2A5 but with many improvements, under the local designation of the Strv 122. This Swedish-licensed variant resembles the Leopard 2A5 with an indigenous turret and other upgrades. The tank features French Galix active protection system and improved command and control. With additional armor, Strv 122 weighs 2 metric tons. The new Leopard III sported a 55 caliber 120-mm smoothbore cannon with a chain drive autoloader and fire control computers that gave it a lethal range of 8,000 meters.

“We have some of those M-22 antitank mines,” Ralph said. “We can dig up a portion of the highway north of Plainfield under the guise of DOT repairs and plant a couple of them. We can also put in a minefield on either side of the road using the same mines.”

“How about we put a dozen guys just on the north edge of town with some AT-4’s?” Gary suggested. “They can salvo with AT-4 in the ass end, the universal weak spot for all tanks and take out any tail-end Charlie’s. Assuming they bring any tanks in the first place.”

“Works for me,” Ralph agreed.

“If they do show up with any of those new tanks, we will want to salvage the fire control computers and the cannons,” Derek said.

“Why?” Gary asked.

“I’ll explain later,” Derek said.

“We don’t know how to do that,” Gary complained.

“That’s ok, Dad I do and I’m going on the mission,” Derek pointed out.

It turned out that Derek also wanted to dig a ditch to stop the tanks, but they didn’t have the time. That proved, in the end, to be fortunate because the Germans only had the Fuchs II personnel carriers and they only had about 30mm of RHA. The vehicles came rolling out of Plainfield around 10am two days later. Punctual these Germans, maybe they better try to overcome that. The lead Fuchs hit one of the 2 mines that were in the ‘DOT’ repair area just past the curve and it got stopped dead in its tracks, figuratively because the Fuchs II is a wheeled vehicle. Fighting positions had been dug from about that point all of the way back to Plainfield and the militiamen rose out of their holes and took out the remaining German vehicles.

The surviving soldiers bailed out of the personnel carriers only to meet the same fate as the Pakistanis. The UN had been twice dumb, and they didn’t expect that it would happen a third time. The militiamen stripped the pride of the Fatherland and distributed the booty. The German Armed Forces fielded the HK416, 5.56×45mm rifles and the militias got a very good haul, about 60 weapons with magazines. Of these, the Floyd militia commandeered 20 weapons.

“What kind of weapon is that?” Gary asked.

“That’s the HK416 Dad,” Derek explained.

“I’ve got to have one of those,” Gary said.

“We only got 20 of them Dad and they shoot the same ammo as the M16,” Derek explained.

“So, you’ve got 19 now, or maybe 18. Ralph would you like one too?” Gary asked clutching the G36 tightly.

“Naw, I favor the M1A,” Ralph said. “Anyway, I have plenty of M16’s.”

“Ralph, it’s an H & K! Screw it Derek, I’ll take Ralph’s too,” Gary announced.

“But Dad,” Derek protested.

“It’s ok Derek, if I don’t like it you can have them back,” Gary replied. “Otherwise, you can have my M16’s.”

As it happened, the HK416s had the H & K AG-C/EGLM add-on Grenade Launcher. The AG-C/EGLM could fire the American 40mm grenades without any modification. Once Gary got the weapon to the range, the Floyd militia had 2 more M16’s and Gary had an ear-to-ear grin. Besides, Ott was a German name and it only made sense for a man with a German name to have German rifles, right? The primary advantage to the rifle was that it used a short stroke gas piston. And, Ralph still hadn’t unboxed the HK-416s or -417s.

On The Cheap – Chapter 26 – The Way Things Are

The Germans were not amused at their Inspection Team being ambushed. They responded by sending out a large numbers of mechanized Infantry and began to inspect communities, doing house-to-house searches for weapons of any description. Any weapons they found were seized and the occupants of the home were subjected to intense questioning. In a few cases, they didn't like the responses they were getting from the defiant occupants and they were arrested and transported to Waterloo. The Germans started in Plainfield, moved on to Nashua, Midway, Charles City and Floyd.

News of the German activity, it hadn't become an atrocity yet, spread quickly. They didn't find so much as a BB gun in Nashua and beyond. They just looked in the wrong place because given a bit of notice the residents made those weapons and munitions disappear. When they got to Floyd, the entire population had disappeared. They searched to homes anyway but came up empty handed. To prevent further acts by what they assumed were American Patriots, or insurgency groups as they called them, the Germans stationed a small detachment in each community.

Down in the cave, Ralph, TOM, Steve and Jim were at a loss to understand why the US military seemed to be sitting idly by while all of this was going on. Derek told them to bide their time, he'd explain how the US military had been reorganized and why they appeared to not be reacting to the UN invasion, as he called it. He was working on a plan for the militias to really make the Germans sit up and take notice. However, he was still putting the finishing touches on his plan and until he was ready, they would just have to be patient.

"I don't see why we sitting on our hands while the Germans are occupying our communities," Ralph complained.

"Derek says he has a plan, so I think that we should just wait," Gary replied. "After he got back from Kosovo in the fall of 2004, I talked to him and he told me that the military was reorganizing. That's why he ended up quitting the guard. Derek is a tanker through and through and they pulled the tanks from the guard and he couldn't join a guard unit close enough to home with tanks, so he up and quit. As I understand it a lot of the guardsmen quit."

[They either failed to reenlist or deserted. Derek didn't reenlist.]

"The military seems to have the idea that they can replace people with gadgets," Ralph grouched. "I don't care what they think; there isn't anything that can take the place of an infantryman and his rifle. That new rifle they were working on is a nightmare. It's a cross between an M16, a 20mm cannon and an optics factory."

Ralph was referring to the XM29, Objective Individual Combat Weapon that it intended to field as part of its Land Warrior initiative. The US military hadn't adopted the XM8 lightweight assault rifle manufactured by H & K at its new plant near Columbus, Geor-

gia, adjacent to Fort Benning, yet. The XM29 had proved to be too heavy and unwieldy and portions of the weapon system were on hold. The Land Warrior system took the infantryman and made him into something from a Star Wars movie, e.g., an Imperial Storm Trooper, replete with computer, a weapon that could shoot around corners, etc. Way back in 2003, Gary had downloaded a pdf file that contained the complete Land Warrior proposal. What a crock.

Gary had never seen combat, but he'd see enough footage on the history channel and knew enough veterans to know that in the end it boiled down to the foot soldier clearing buildings, rounding up prisoners and dying, all too often, for mom, apple pie and his or her country.

And the German reaction to the attack, while understandable and predictable, was really a bad idea. There are 999 communities in Iowa. Some of them are very small and some large for a state like Iowa. Now, some of those other communities no doubt had militias of their own and they were probably doing their thing. It's hard to say because the Iowa Patriot Network was such a fledgling thing and the communications were only beginning to be established. The tour of duty in Kosovo had taught Derek many lessons about what an occupying force could and should do. But, he had yet to share those lessons with the folks. Iraq had been a lesson for the American public, had they paid attention. Those Iraqi insurgents were difficult to deal with because they just blended in and didn't walk around waiving a flag or carry a sign saying, "Hi I'm an insurgent, arrest me."

How do Iowa communities differ from the thousands of other communities around the US? They don't. You could pretty much figure that whatever was going on in Iowa was going on all around the nation. Under the new doctrines, the US military was hard pressed to take any sort of initiative either. The best that they could do was form their own guerilla units and snip, snip, snip. Hey why not, it worked for Charlie and it worked for the Iraqi insurgents. Americans were different now than they were in WW II. They expected the US military to walk in wipe out the enemy with virtually no American casualties and to promptly leave. They didn't really like it when the military got involved in a prolonged war that seemed to have no end. Especially the liberals who were proud to be Americans as long as it was someone else's kid doing the dying. Maybe that's not right, maybe the liberals preferred to talk the enemy to death.

Do you suppose Lee Greenwood was still proud to be an American... *God Bless the USA*? After the Gulf War in 1991, Lee was one of the most in-demand performers. Because of his support for the military and veterans during that time, Lee would often play two and sometimes three shows per day, traveling to and from in private jets. If you say no, I'll take the bet.

Don't see an M-22 mine at Global Security.org? I didn't either, but Derek told me about them. They're made of plastic and require 800 pounds of direct pressure to set them off. However, from his description, they sound a lot like the M-19 ATM. He usually doesn't get his nomenclature wrong, so does the US have a new ATM? They didn't stick around to remove the unexploded mines from the fields at Plainfield, forcing them to return later

and remove them. Big deal, the areas on either side of the road were Prairie Grass and the mines were just sitting in the grass. Yes, they were being conscious of the hazard the mines represented, but in truth, they didn't have many of the mines and needed them.

Two squad-sized German units garrisoned Floyd. Charles City rated a Company of troops and Nashua rated 2 platoons. In spreading their troops out, the Germans had left themselves vulnerable to attack everywhere it seemed, except in Charles City. They stationed some of those Leopard 2A6 tanks in Charles City. Only 4 tanks, but that was 4 too many. Two squads equals 2 Fuchs APC's, with a Leutnant in charge. A German Leutnant is equivalent to a butter bar and this particular guy was as green as grass. He had a Feldwebel (Sergeant) who knew the ropes, but like so many young Lieutenants, the man just wouldn't listen. So much the better for the Floyd militia hiding out in that cave.

"Patience is a virtue," Gary told Derek.

"It's easy for you to be patient Dad," Derek retorted, "You're too old and decrepit to fight."

"And you're in too big of a hurry to get killed," Gary snapped. "We're a local militia unit, not the Green Berets."

"Yes, but, we know the town and the Germans don't," Derek insisted.

"Where are they set up?" Gary asked.

"At Keppel's Restaurant," Derek related. "They have those 2 APC's parked right out front."

"But they're patrolling the town, right?" Gary asked.

"No, they're holed up in the restaurant," Derek replied.

"Sentries?" Gary asked.

"Of course they have sentries," Derek said, "But they rarely leave the restaurant."

"Fine, take a couple of AT-4's and blow up the APC's," Gary suggested.

"Real smart Dad," Derek retorted. "We'll probably end up with some of those Leopards in Floyd."

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Meanwhile, around the US a strange thing was happening. Parts of the country, when viewed from satellite, were disappearing. The landscape southwestern US is dotted with dry lakebeds. Two of the most famous are Rogers and Groom. Some of those lakebeds, like Groom, are rather inaccessible. And, some of those lakebeds, like Groom, were disappearing as the military rushed to put camouflage netting in place. A whole lot of the US Air Force's inventory of fighters and bombers had disappeared in the early days of the UN's appearance on US soil. Those generals were cooperating with the UN all right, but a lot of equipment and munitions had disappeared, together with a lot of airmen, soldiers, sailors and marines. The personnel were listed as AWOL or deserters, but they hadn't really.

From all outward appearances, the US military had handed the UN its sword. The truth was far different from the appearance of things. The Joint Chiefs tried to explain away the missing munitions by claiming that they had expended most of the weapons in training. The UN didn't buy it, but couldn't prove otherwise. A computer programmer had altered the US's computer that controlled the satellites and they gave a position offset about 1.5° from their true position. Thus when the UN seized the satellite controls, they were getting incorrect information. The pictures were real enough; they were just of a place 1.5° east of their supposed location. And for some reason, no one took particular notice in the beginning. By the time that they figured it out, the camouflaging operation was complete.

It's not hard to get a feeling for how many of the various types of aircraft, tanks, etc., the US has in inventory at any particular time, just check with FAS or Global Security. However, the Generals and Admirals had several other programmers corrupting the databases, lowering the numbers of weapons systems; pretty clever these Generals and Admirals. Jane's Information Group has the same information except it is more accurate and perhaps more timely. However, Great Britain is an ally of the United States and they'd developed computer problems, forcing them to go to older backup tapes to restore their system. Knowing that the information was outdated, the UN Generals didn't trust Jane's to give them reliable information.

To further the illusion, the Joint Chiefs complained bitterly to their UN liaisons about how the Democratic President and Congress had stripped the military. Like I said, the UN wasn't buying it completely, but they were hard pressed to prove otherwise. No problem, the UN Commanders thought, we'll just check out places like Area 51, etc. Those were one-way trips for whomever they sent; which only added to their suspicions, but continued to leave them empty handed. The UN would have moved a substantial force of armor and infantry to check out a place like Area 51, but they couldn't spare either because of the insurgency within the US. What had appeared to be a slam-dunk had turned into a nightmare. Not only was the US population armed, they were now armed with military equipment. Those deserters and AWOL personnel weren't in uniform either. In fact only a show force of the US military remained in uniform.

Vast areas of the western US are empty desert, a fact not lost on the US military. That explains why Ft. Irwin and 29 Palms existed; there was no one to get in the way or who

might get injured in the event of a stray round. Even a place like Edwards AFB with its 400,000 plus acres had a few hiding places. The Joint Chiefs were cooperating with the UN, giving guided tours of all of their facilities, like Edwards, for example. Except for some, but Area 51 doesn't exist, right? I can't seem to find it on anything but some old maps, anyway. Wait a minute, what about all of those pictures we've seen of Area 51? The place had to exist, right? Sure it did, but the UN inspectors didn't find anything when they checked the place out. Ever played 3-card Monte? Ever win? The pea is right under that shell, right there! Oops, how could I have gotten that wrong? Announced trips were coming up empty and unannounced trips were costing personnel, go figure.

Well, these UN Generals didn't just fall off a turnip truck; they knew that they were being had. But there were priorities and that didn't include searching for missing US military equipment that appeared to be in the hands of a cooperative US military. (Yesterday, Saturday October 23, 2004, they commissioned the SSN774 Virginia, btw. Her motto is: Sic Semper Tyrannis.) And, where was the American navy? The Admirals had moved it out and it was in Australia and Great Britain, otherwise neutral countries in this affair, having refused, along with Russia, to take part in an invasion of the United States.

By now, one would have expected that all of those Ohio class submarines would have released their cargoes and wiped out the rest of the world, right? Wrong, too many countries that were participating in the UN Peacekeeping mission were nuclear powers by 2011. That was one Genie that the military wasn't going to let out of the bottle, had they the ability, and the President had the PAL codes. Permissive Action Links gave civilians control over military assets. And, these civilians had invited the UN in. Of course, something like this will never happen in the United States of America, the most powerful nation in the world. There are too many checks and balances. BS with a capital "B".

The population of the United States in 2011 was slightly in excess of 300 million. Figure 50.9% of the population is female and 21.4% were age 14 and under. That was 11-year-old data, but it sort of gave the picture and they haven't released the 2010 census data yet. The distinction of being female probably doesn't mean much when it comes to fighting for one's country. The two real limiters are probably age and politics, e.g., you are too young to fight or you're a liberal who likes the UN in the country. Which means that probably about 1/3 of the country was trying to free the US from the UN's yoke. And perhaps, that's being generous.

Authors Note: What do you do when you get writer's block? You flesh out the story with background information. I have a house full of company on the way and Derek promised to help with the next chapter. But, I'm doing fine, thanks for asking. BS was 77 this am. BP was 109/50 with a PR of 52. Did a lot of work yesterday, shampooing carpets, etc. getting ready for the company. I'll have to smoke more cigarettes to get the BP up a little; don't want the wife to worry.

On The Cheap – Chapter 27 – Plop, Plop, Fizz, Fizz

Ron Brown needed those two Alka Seltzer. It sure had been a while since he'd seen Gar-Bear and Clarence. In a way, Gary had been right about him moving to New Mexico. He hadn't been there 2 months before he'd had another heart attack and the doctor in Durango had to schedule a second bypass surgery. He had been weeks, even months recuperating from that one. Every surgery seemed to drain him a little more. While he was trying to heal, the President had invited the UN in. Living out in the middle of nowhere hadn't prevented some foreign troops from checking up on them, but when they saw the condition he was in, they'd left quickly.

Those troops must have assumed that in his condition, Ronald McDonald wasn't a threat. They were right, he wasn't when they were there, he was having a particularly bad day, but he was healing. He tried to reach out and talk to Gary, but no one answered the phone. He figured that Gary was probably in that stinking cave he'd talked about or out shooting one of those new rifles. Ron made it a point to get all the exercise his system could bear and each day he got a little stronger. They had a ton of money from selling their home and Linda's father's estate so Ron persuaded Linda to trade in one of their cars on a new diesel pickup and Airstream trailer.

Robert knew of a fella in Farmington who did some custom work and Ron asked his brother to take the trailer down and drop it off. What he wanted was a modification that would allow him to move his considerable arsenal in the Airstream without it being detected. Bob drove the trailer down and explained to the guy what his brother wanted. It seemed that more than one person had wanted something similar and the guy knew just how to do it. He told Robert to leave the trailer and be back in a week, with his checkbook.

A week later, Ron was feeling good enough to make the trip and he went with Robert to pick up the trailer. This guy was very creative; he not only had a gun locker built in, but an ammo storage area. And the beauty of it was that unless you knew the secret, you couldn't access either. The UN had implemented interstate travel restrictions when the unrest began around the United States. Ron heard that that was partly due to some trouble the Pakistanis had in Iowa. While Ron didn't have enough information to know for sure, he half suspected that Gary was probably in the thick of it.

The travel restrictions meant that you had to have a legitimate reason to travel and a US passport. Since Ron and Linda had the passports, they only needed the reason. In one of her letters, Paula had written that she'd been ill. Paula and her husband Mark lived in Austin, Minnesota. Since Austin is only about 50 miles from Charles City/Floyd, Ron had the reason. They applied for a travel permit to go visit Paula and Mark because of her illness. This particular bunch of foreign troops, running the travel permit office, was Mexican soldiers. Ron spoke enough pidgin Spanish and the fella taking the applications enough pidgin English that they got the permit applied for and eventually issued. Ron had to submit a separate application to get papers to allow him to move his Airstream interstate and that was even more time consuming. When finally they had all of

their 'papers', Ron and Linda headed for Iowa. Before they left, Ron called Clarence and told him he was headed to Floyd, Iowa to hook up with old Gar-Bear.

Clarence told Ronald that things just hadn't been the same since The Three Amigos had split up and that he was having one hell of a time in Alabama since the UN had shown up. In Alabama, they sent in African troops and Clarence claimed he just didn't fit in. He said that he'd talk to Shirley and see if she was interested in heading to Iowa. If she was, they would catch up with him and Linda. If she wasn't, have a good trip and call him when they got there.

What is it, maybe a 3-day drive from Durango, Colorado to Floyd, Iowa? Before the UN, yes; after, you had to think again. The easiest way to get to Iowa from Durango was to take US 160 east to I-25, I-25 north to Denver and I-76. Then you took I-76 to I-80 and took I-80 to Des Moines where you picked up I-35 to Mason City. The other way to go was to pick up I-70 in Denver and take it to Kansas City where you picked up I-35 and took it through Des Moines to Mason City. The first day they made it to Alamosa where they got stopped because of some problem with their 'papers'. That took 2 days to straighten out. Ron had assurances from the officer in charge at Alamosa that their papers were now in order. There wasn't anything wrong with their papers, but they'd made Ron and Linda sit for 2 days because Ron didn't have the smarts to slip someone a C-note.

By the time they reached Pueblo, Ron was ready to pull off the road and go looking for The Ark; it was supposed to be around there somewhere. That was \$300 beyond Alamosa, as the bribes go. Pueblo was another delay and even money didn't seem to smooth their way. There was some trouble in the Denver area that had spread down to Colorado Springs and they simply had to wait until the UN restored order. Ten days later, they resumed their trip and got to Denver where more money exchanged hands. It was a very good thing that Ron had thought to bring lots of cash. Most of it was stored with the guns and was safe from discovery, but it made him uneasy traveling with that much cash. By this time, Ron was feeling a little punk, so they stopped by a doctor's office in Denver. His doctor in Durango had given Linda the name and number in case he had any problems. This required a change in medications and a 2-day layover.

Linda was driving the pickup when they left Denver 2 days later. She took I-76 to I-80, paid the 'highway entry fee' and they proceeded eastbound on I-80. They made it as far as North Platte before encountering any more trouble. In North Platte, they had to lie over for 3 days while extensions to their travel permits were processed. Then, after paying another 'highway entry fee', they made it as far as Lincoln before they had more trouble. The German sphere of influence extended as far west as Lincoln, Nebraska and as far north as southern Minnesota. Once they got to Lincoln, Ron and Linda were held up while the Germans checked with their troops in Austin and verified that Ron actually had a daughter in Austin. This took 4 days despite the usual German efficiency. There was no more 'highway entry fees' once they entered the German sphere of influence, but the Germans gave that Airstream and their car a thorough going over. They

didn't find anything, but it had Ron worried for a while because they took so long to search the Airstream.

From there, it was a straight shot to Des Moines. They lay over for the night and planned to go to Mason City the next day. Gary had told Ron to get on highway 18 when he got off I-35 and go through Mason City, Nora Springs and Rudd until he got to Floyd. At the Floyd turnoff, Ron was to take 218 north 2 miles and theirs would be the first house on the right. In Mason City the Germans gave Ron a little trouble but he told them that he was going to Floyd to pick up 218 and take it straight into Austin. They told him it was the long way around but let him pass. A half hour later Ron took the Floyd turnoff and headed north. Two miles north of town, he spotted a farmhouse a little ways up the road on the right and pulled in. There wasn't anyone home. However, there was someone watching the house from a distance and about 30 minutes later, a pickup pulled in, just as Ron was going to head to town and ask for directions.

"Hey butthead," Gary said getting out of the pickup.

"That's my line," Ron said giving Gary a firm handshake. (Must be heathens, they didn't hug.)

"What the hell are you doing here?" Gary asked.

"Clarence show up yet?" Ron asked.

"What, I can't have an adventure with a nice bunch of Iowa folks without doing The Three Amigos thing?" Gary asked.

"Look butthead, we just spent the better part of a lifetime getting here, how about a cup of coffee before we spend the rest of our life trying to get back to New Mexico?" Ron asked.

"Did you bring 'everything' with you?" Gary asked.

"Of course," Ron replied.

"Well, partner, I have something for you and a whole lot of people for you to meet," Gary said. "Back that pickup up and follow me."

Gary drove south on 218 to the first right and west to just short of where the road turned north. He pulled into Steve and Becky's and got out to wait for Ron and Linda. When Ron pulled in, Ralph directed Ron to park his Airstream in the machine shed. Ron told Ralph, to whom he had yet to be introduced, that he wasn't all that good at backing up a trailer. Ralph told him to get out and Damon backed the trailer into the machine shed. Then, everyone headed to the cave to get the cup of coffee. Ron noticed that the burnt out ruins of a home were tumbled into a basement and that was where they were headed. When they got there, Derek lifted up sections of burnt material revealing a staircase

down to another staircase that presumably led to the cave. They followed Gary into the cave and he led them to the main room.

“Ron Brown,” Gary said, “I want to introduce you to Ralph Perkins and his wife Lorraine, Dr. Steve Cooper and his wife Dr. Becky Cooper, Jim and Barbara, uh, Jim if anyone ever told me your last name, I forgot,” Gary said.

“Thompson, same as the old Doc,” Jim said. “He’s my uncle.”

“Where was I,” Gary said, “Oh, yeah, and Jim and Barbara Thompson. You know Damon and Derek and Lorrie and Amy. This young lady is my daughter-in-law Mary, Derek’s wife and this is Cindy, Damon’s girlfriend. I don’t know if you’ve met David, Lorrie significant other. Who did I forget?”

“The town of Floyd,” Ralph said, “But Ron can meet them later.”

“Howdy folks, nice to meet you. This is my wife Linda who Gary rudely failed to introduce. Now how about that cup of coffee?”

“What’s this crap about ‘is Clarence here yet’?” Gary asked.

“Well, I called him and he said he’d talk to Shirley about coming here. Apparently they’re not getting along with those African UN folks down in Alabama,” Ron explained.

“Wait here a minute,” Gary said, “I’ve got something for you.” Gary returned in a blink or two and handed Ron a rifle.

“What’s this?” Ron asked.

“That is the preferred weapon of the German infantry, the HK416 with the AG-C/EGLM grenade launcher,” Gary said. “Dang fine weapon even though it’s only a 5.56. Anyway, it will punch you back a little for the M16 and the M1A.”

“You still have them, don’t you?” Ron asked.

“Hell yeah,” Gary said. “I bought some more M16’s and traded 2 of those for 2 of the HK416s.”

“Just what do you shoot with all of those fine weapons?” Ron asked.

“Well, I punch some nice holes in paper, partner, but I’m consider TOO OLD AND DECREPIT to actually participate in any combat operations,” Gary replied, emphasizing the old and decrepit part for the benefit of Derek.

“Well you are, Gar-Bear,” Ron said.

"Yeah, I know," Gary agreed, "But he didn't have to say it. So, do you expect Clarence to show up?"

"Hell, I don't know," Ron admitted, "But if he's as unhappy about Alabama as he sounded, he'll be along if he can get the right papers."

"What do you mean the right papers?" Gary asked.

"Well, you have to have a Passport, a legitimate reason to travel and then, if you're pulling a trailer, you have to get it papers, too," Ron explained. "Don't you have any Sweet and Low?"

"Will Equal do?" Gary asked.

"No," Ron said.

"I know who I forgot to introduce. Julie, this is my amigo Ron Brown and his wife Linda. Ron and Linda this is Julie Cooper, Steve's mom and I forgot to mention that Ralph and Lorraine are Becky's parents. Do you have any Sweet and Low in your kitchen?"

"Hi folks," Julie said, "Sure, we have Sweet and Low, give me a second."

"I don't see why you have to have saccharine when you can have aspartame," Gary said.

"Yeah, well I don't see why you had to have Kathy when you had Sharon," Ron countered.

"Hey, that hitting below the belt," Gary said.

"Exactly," Ron laughed.

"You two and your antics are going to take some getting used to," Ralph said.

"Just wait until Clarence shows up, if he does," Ron warned.

"It's ok Ralph," Gary added, "I've got about 1,000 Xanax if we drive you nuts."

"So what have you been up to?" Ron asked. "I heard they had trouble in Iowa and figured you were right in the middle of it."

"Nothing much, partner," Gary said. "The Floyd militia took out a dozen Pakistani M-113s and the Charles City and Floyd militias took out a dozen German Fuchs APC's."

"Just your usual, huh?" Ron said.

“I didn’t get to go along on either operation,” Gary complained.

“I knew that already Gar-Bear,” Ron said. “They were successful operations, right?”

On The Cheap – Chapter 28 – But We Don't Speak the Language

After Ron called, Clarence started to work on Shirley. That took the better part of two weeks to get her to agree. Then, they had trouble getting Passports. That required a trip to the Birmingham Federal building to get the forms, photographs and completing the applications. When they returned, the government clerk processed their applications in a single day and they now had the paperwork. But, they didn't have a legitimate excuse to travel to Iowa. Clarence decided to tell the Bantu or Swahili speaking UN administrators that he had to attend a funeral for a friend in northern Iowa. That greased their way and they had papers the same day.

Clarence and Shirley were traveling light. They sold off everything in California before they left and had rented an apartment when they got to Birmingham. They stored their things at their son's home and headed north. Now, the travel papers had 'Bereavement Pass' stamped on them and they did really very well driving to Iowa. They didn't have any trouble at all and made the trip in two days, once they got the Passports and 'papers'. In fact, they arrived at Gary and Sharon's new old house about 2 hours behind Ron and Linda. This time, there was a note on the door that said, "Just wait Clarence, we'll pick you up." So they waited and about 30 minutes later Gary came pulling up in that pickup.

"Ron here yet?" Clarence asked.

"Yeah, partner, he got in about 2 hours ago, what did you use for your legitimate reason?" Gary asked.

"Well, I drove up here to attend your funeral," Clarence said.

"But I'm not dead," Gary complained.

"That's easy enough to fix," Clarence laughed.

"Are Chris and Patti behind you?" Gary asked.

"Those folks in Palmdale?" Clarence inquired, "Not that I know of, no."

"Well, I could take them showing up too," Gary said, "But if they brought Darlene, I'd move back to Palmdale. Follow me and I'll take you to the Floyd Municipal Shelter."

It was a repeat of Ron's arrival except that Clarence didn't need any help backing his car into the machine shed. Gary led them to the basement and down to the cave. He went through the introductions a second time, this time remembering to include Julie. I won't say that Clarence and Lucy stuck out much, but there were some murmurs among the Floyd people. Not that anyone disapproved, but they were just taken a little off guard by the appearance of the black couple.

“So, you're that last member of The Three Amigos?” Ralph asked.

“I guess so,” Clarence replied. “That was something someone commented on in one of Gary’s stories and he picked up and ran with it.”

“And I presume that your last name isn’t Rawlings, either?” Ralph asked.

“That’s right Ralph,” Clarence said, “Our name is Floyd; Rawlings is my sister’s married name. I’ve told Gary my last name a 100 times, but he can never remember it. My wife’s name is Shirley, not Lucy. Besides, he gave most everyone phony last names in his stories.”

“We call Gary TOM around here,” Ralph suggested. “How much is what TOM wrote in his stories about you two fellas is true?”

“Enough that we should have kicked his butt a long time ago,” Ron replied.

“So Clarence, how are you fixed up with weapons?” Gary asked.

“Got me a shotgun and my .38,” Clarence said.

“Derek, trade me another of the HK416 with the AG-C/EGLMs for one of my M16’s with the M203,” Gary asked Derek.

“I thought you turned in all of your M203’s for the militia to use, Dad,” Derek said.

“I held out on you,” Gary admitted. “Make sure you don’t take the M16 that Ron gave me and get Clarence a decent handgun, extra magazines for everything and some AL-ICE gear. Clarence has an 870, so get him a 20” smooth bore barrel with an improved cylinder choke, rifle sights and an 8-round magazine extension. Clarence, we’ll get you ammo later. Do you want some of that pansy tactical buck or some real stuff?”

“What do you use?” Clarence asked.

“What do you mean, what do I use?” Gary laughed, “15-pellet 00 buck of course.”

“Why?” Clarence asked.

“Because 15-pellets are more than 8, 9 or 12-pellets?” Gary half asked.

“My shotgun and revolver are buried under all of the stuff in my trunk, Derek,” Clarence explained.

“I’ll go with you Derek and we can bring in my weapons and ammo,” Ron suggested. “Damon, you and David had better come along to help.”

“That’s ok Ron,” Derek said, “We have a cart.”

“I figured that, but you’ll need a couple of carts and have to make multiple trips,” Ron explained.

“How much ammo do you have?” Derek asked, a little surprised.

“Enough that a sharp weigh station attendant would have noticed the difference in weight of the trailer,” Ron told him.

Ron wasn’t kidding either. He had enough of the Wal-Mart 5.56 ammo to fight a war all by himself. He managed to pick up a fair amount of ammo for his unusual caliber weapons in Colorado before his surgery. He only had 2,000 rounds for the M1A, but that was all Black Hills match grade ammo. They scrounged up an extra M203 for his M16A3 and he was totally equipped. Derek said that his method of transporting the guns and ammo was ingenious and that probably only an Airstream dealer or representative would have noticed the subtle changes to the trailer.

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The military was finally ready to move against the UN in an organized fashion and bring American airpower into the equation. The Navy had some plans, too, but they required the highest-ranking naval officers to be picked up by submarine and transported to Great Britain. The Jimmy Carter, the 3rd of the Seawolf class submarines was tasked to that duty. Compare the Jimmy Carter and the Seawolf, they are very different. Once the Naval officers were safely in England, the Navy was ready to begin operations against the UN. Pursuant to Congressional commitments and long-term naval planning, the 688I class Los Angeles subs had been upgraded, more Virginia class submarines had been built and there wasn’t a Navy in the world that could stand up against the US Navy.

The F-22 Raptor construction program was schedule to go into high gear at 90 aircraft per year in 2006. However, the Republicans on the Hill, fearing what might happen if the Democrats took power had forced the production rate to be doubled. Consequently, the last of the Raptors had rolled of the assembly line 3 years early and there was little the Democrats could do to change the procurement program when they took power in 2008. The Republicans were well advised to take the actions that they did and when they took power, the Democrats were helpless to stop the procurement programs. Not that they didn’t try, but between Filibusters, procedural votes and everything thing else the Republicans could muster, by the time the Democrats wrestled control over the procurement programs away from the Republican minority, many of the procurement programs were completed.

The US Army, on the other hand, was reinventing the wheel and their reorganization didn’t make much sense to people like Gary and Ralph. Theoretically, it seemed to be based on the Land Warrior Concept and the Army was changing its mix of vehicles and

armor. Under the reorganization, the Army would still have its Abrams, just no 'tank drivers'. All of the Abrams in the hands of the National Guard units would be returned to the Army. I should mention, and will bring it up later, that the Iowa National Guard has about 200 of the obsolete 8" cannons. I should also point out that all retired weapons systems pass through the Rock Island Arsenal in Rock Island, Illinois.

Apparently the Army didn't subscribe to the philosophy that if it isn't broke, don't fix it. It's ok; this is the same Army that adopted the M16 and the M9. Did you read about those deficiencies I mentioned? You should have, some of the equipment the US military is fielding is junk.

Moreover, there are Super Fund Sites in Iowa, 3 in Charles City alone! Derek told Gary that there was a manufacturing plant sitting empty in Iowa that was closed down by the government. The plant had manufactured components and/or tank cannon shells for the 120mm Abrams cannon. Derek suggested that they ought to look into getting that plant up and running and manufacture shells for the 55 caliber German cannons. On the other hand, maybe they could just give those Germans some of the well water from the contaminated wells. No big deal, all it had in it was arsenic.

The Germans had imposed further travel restrictions and limited anyone from traveling more than 30 miles from home without a permit. They were micro managing the situation to where they were straining their resources to enforce the 'rules'. It was especially bad in Charles City because of those 4 Leopard 2A6s. The Sheriff was fit to be tied because his people couldn't really move around. The Germans even had a Noncom riding with all of his Deputies. One of the Deputies had the same guy all of the time and that fella really liked European Roast coffee. So naturally, the Deputy brought the fella his own thermos of coffee. That Noncom was still praising the coffee when he passed out. The Deputy had Floyd and he zipped up to the cave with the sleeping soldier in his car.

"What do you have there, Deputy?" Ralph asked.

"A Kraut full of European Blend," the Deputy laughed. "I don't expect him to wake up for about 3 more hours."

"Coffee too much for him?" Ralph chuckled.

"The Sheriff's Department's new Special Blend is, yes," the Deputy smiled.

"What brings you here?" Ralph asked.

"The Sheriff has been spending quite a bit of time studying those bombings that the President and Congress used as an excuse to bring in the UN," the Deputy said. "He wants to talk to you and the fella from California about it."

"Oh?" Ralph responded. "It was terrorists, right?"

“The Sheriff doesn’t think so, no,” the Deputy said. “He said to tell you to meet him at the 8th hole at Wildwood at 9pm.” (The Charles City golf course.)

“Why didn’t he just call me?” Ralph asked.

“You’ll have to ask him, Ralph,” the Deputy said. “Well, I’ve got to go set up a speed trap so when Fritz here wakes up, he won’t realize we’ve been here.”

“What did you give him anyway?” Ralph asked.

“I don’t know, something the drugstore worked up,” the Deputy said. “They said that when he wakes up he won’t feel drugged or anything.”

“Tell the Sheriff that we’ll be there at 9pm,” Ralph said and turned to return to the cave.

“TOM,” Ralph hollered, “Wait up a minute.”

“What’s happening?” Gary asked.

“The Sheriff wants to meet us at Wildwood at 9pm,” Ralph said.

“That’s an 18-hole golf course, where exactly?” Gary asked.

“8th hole,” Ralph said.

“What does he want?” Gary inquired.

“The Deputy didn’t say, exactly, but it has something to do with all of those terrorists bombings,” Ralph explained.

“Suppose the Sheriff would mind if Ron and Clarence tagged along?” Gary asked.

“How should I know what’s on the guy’s mind?” Ralph asked. “I have to work with him but I don’t have to like him or understand him.”

“Ok, we’ll be ready,” Gary agreed.

On The Cheap – Chapter 29 – Something’s Fishy

At 8:45 Ralph pulled in and parked at the 8th hole at Wildwood. The Sheriff was already there, waiting. He got out of his patrol car and walked over to Ralph’s car and slid in the back seat.

“Who are these two guys?” Russ asked.

“They’re TOM’s friends from California,” Ralph explained. “The short fat ugly guy is Ron Brown and the tall handsome black man is Clarence Floyd.”

Gary let out a squeal of delight at Ralph’s description of Ron and Clarence grinned so broadly that all you could see was teeth.

“Where do you get o...” Ron started to say.

“Ronald McDonald, Ralph has been reading my fiction,” Gary chortled.

“They ok Ralph?” Russ asked.

“Sheriff, anything you’d say to me you can say to them,” Gary answered. “We’ve been through more crap than the law allows.”

“Criminals, huh?” Russ asked.

“No Sir,” Clarence spoke up, “We’re *The Three Amigos*.”

“Never heard of you,” Russ said.

“They’re ok Sheriff,” Ralph said. “What’s on your mind?”

“I been looking at all those bombings and I don’t think those were the work of terrorists,” the Sheriff announced.

“TOM and I came to that conclusion a long time ago,” Ralph said. “My exact words were, ‘say we had another terrorist attack that had a country wide effect. Those liberals in Washington would probably end up screaming for help and invite the UN in or not resist an offer of help.’”

“That’s right Sheriff,” Gary said, “And furthermore, that power outage had to be the work of the same people or a bunch of their friends.”

“How do you figure that?” the sheriff asked.

“Go out on the web and find out everything you can about power plants in this country,” Gary suggested. “If you get enough information after a month of trying to blow up the power grid like it was done, you’re smarter than Albert Einstein.”

“What do you mean?” Russ asked.

“They, either the power companies or the government, took it all off the net after 9/11,” Gary replied.

“How do you know that?” Russ asked.

“Research, Sheriff, research,” Gary chuckled.

“Let’s say that I buy into all of that,” Russ said, “Who do you figure is behind it?”

“The government,” Ralph and Gary chorused.

“Who in the government?” the Sheriff asked.

“We never got that far Sheriff,” Ralph replied. “Could have been the CIA.”

“I agree,” Gary said. Ron and Clarence had been staring, but now they were nodding their agreement with Ralph and Gary.

“So what are we going to do about it?” Russ asked.

“Nothing, Sheriff, not one thing,” Gary quickly answered. “We got trouble enough fighting the Germans. Let the military get to the bottom of it.”

“We haven’t seen much action out of the military,” the Sheriff observed.

“What did you expect, Sheriff?” Gary asked. “Don’t give up on the military just yet. I have a feeling that the UN is about to get its butt kicked.”

The Sheriff seemed to be upset that he hadn’t been the first to realize that something was fishy about the power grid going down and those bombings, especially the bombings. He told the 4 men that he’d see them later and got out of Ralph’s car and back into his own. The men were pretty quiet on the way back to Floyd. They had to keep a sharp lookout because of the dust to dawn curfew that was in effect. Ralph skirted Floyd and they went back to the cave. When they got there, Ron was the first to speak.

“Gar-Bear, you are just a natural born conspiracy theorist,” Ron said.

“Why thank you, partner,” Gary smiled.

“That wasn’t a compliment,” Ron said.

“Sure it was, you just didn’t know it,” Gary laughed out loud.

“Gary, do you really think the government is behind all of this?” Clarence asked.

“You heard what I told the Sheriff, Clarence,” Gary replied, “Who else would have the motive, means and opportunity?”

“I can think of a lot of people,” Ron said.

“Me, too,” Clarence added.

“If you assume the motive was to bring down the power grid and start some kind of disturbance,” Gary explained, “Then I agree with you. But, what if the motive was to bring in the UN and disarm the American public?”

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At Nellis AFB an encrypted transmission was received from England. The Admirals were in place and ready to begin a campaign against UN shipping. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, who was now secure at Area 51, replied that they should go ahead. The information was relayed to Australia and to Diego Garcia and the carriers made ready to set sail. The 688I class, the Seawolf class and the Virginia class submarines sailed almost immediately. Their mission was simple; if the ship was involved in the UN’s mission, sink it.

A flight of KC-46 tankers, the newest in the Air Force’s fleet took off followed shortly thereafter by the Nighthawks, the Spirits and the Lancers. A short time later, the Raptors took off to provide a CAP for the tankers. The bombers were all loaded with a broad range of precision and dumb bombs, conventional in nature. At a similar time, flights of C-130’s took off loaded with MOABs. The bombers’ missions, though differing in specific targets, were essentially all the same. Their mission was equally obvious; they were to bomb the UN troop concentrations. All, that is, except for the lead Spirit whose crew was to bomb a certain skyscraper in NYC. The thing that had held the entire plan up was the Admirals. It also seems that word had gotten out about that 55 caliber gun and none of the crews were anxious to go up against them when they showed up on the battlefield.

For those few who don’t know, a cannon is measured by the bore, e.g., 120mm, 155mm, 8” (203mm) and by the length of the barrel. A 40-caliber barrel is 40 times 120mm in length, etc. Generally the longer the barrel the greater the range, just like with a rifle. Well now, the published range of the M256 cannon was 3,000 meters. The range of the Leopard 2A6s had the L55 cannon. And, the Germans had just started to ship the Leopard 2A7+, e.g., Leopard 3 tanks to the US. However, the Army had a little trick up its sleeve in the form of the MRM. Having been successfully test fired, the Army began to field the new rounds. Originally developed for the Future Combat System Mounted

Combat Systems vehicle, the projectile satisfied the need for a beyond line of sight capability, defeating threats with pinpoint accuracy and minimize collateral damage and exposure of U.S. forces to hostile fire.

During the first test of the MRM (Medium Range Munition) the projectile had been launched from the M256 gun and had hit a tank at a range of 3 miles. The current Abrams tank could also fire the MRM, extending the life of the tank and improving its lethality. 8,000 meters was a long ways, ≥ 5 miles, but the 2A5s only had a range of 3,000 meters. With the new rounds, the M1A2SEPs were ready to roll and had an effective range of 5,000 meters. Maybe the US did something right after all. With the L55 gun, the range would be $\geq 8,000$ meters.

Under the modernization plan, elements of every type were combined into operating units. Each operating unit resembled a miniature Army with armory, infantry, air assets, etc. And the infantry was mechanized with the Stryker's. Under the modernization plan, the first FCS unit was to be fielded in fiscal 2008, with 32 brigades so equipped by fiscal 2014. Under the old plan, the first unit was set for 2012. Deployment of the first fully modernized FCS Unit of Action, with only 2,500 soldiers, slipped by two years, to 2014. The Army's experimental unit, to stand up in 2008, tested the new technology. The two extra years in the FCS schedule would have given time to field all 18 planned systems by 2014, versus the 13 that would have been available by 2012. The military had accelerated everything and what had been planned for 2014 was in place at the beginning of 2011.

The first round of air strikes were followed by the C-130's with their MOABs. The UN scrambled all of their air assets, but those JAS-39 fighters couldn't match the F-22's. Only a few of the JAS-45's had been brought to the US with the majority being deployed to defend Europe. Good thinking, but it didn't take into account the stealth features of certain American aircraft. The aging Buff's were brought into play after the Raptors began to clear the skies and they carpet bombed enemy formations.

What followed, from a military planning point of view was a month long campaign to destroy the UN's air and ground assets. The UN forces weren't afraid to put their planes up, unlike the Iraqis, and the battle for air supremacy was costly. I don't suppose that you'd be surprised if I suggested that the American forces prevailed, in the end, would you? There I go again, getting ahead of the story.

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"Why would you think that the motive was to bring in the UN and disarm the American public?" Ron asked.

"I don't know, because it's happening?" Gary challenged.

"TOM, I think that Daddy and you are probably right," Becky said, "What are we going to do about it?"

“One of these days, the military is going to come out of hiding and attack the UN in force,” Gary replied. “When that happens, all of the militia units are going to have to get together and give the UN Peacekeepers something to keep them occupied. We older folks, like Ralph, Ron, Clarence and me can stay here and guard the cave. All of you young folks can get out there and keep the Germans busy.”

“Even if we get the militias from all of the towns in the area, that will be risky,” Steve suggested, “What we need is an edge.”

“Doc, we have an edge,” Gary pointed out. “Our people know the territory and we’re going to do what they did back in the Revolutionary War, snipe and needle the Germans to death. We wouldn’t stand a chance in a face-to-face confrontation, IMHO, but that doesn’t mean we can’t give them hell.”

“What about Derek’s plan?” Becky asked.

“He’s told me parts of it, Becky,” Gary replied. “He wants to attack the Sullivan Brother’s Auditorium in Waterloo where the regional UN people are headquartered.”

“Won’t that make people angry?” Jim asked.

“Maybe. But I think that it’s a chance for the Sullivan Brothers to serve their country one last time,” Gary suggested.

They spent the remainder of the night and all of the next day formulating plans to harass the Germans. In some respects it was a repeat of the Revolutionary War. In the 1770’s, King George III, a German, employed Hessian Troops, mercenaries, in the American colonies. It wasn’t the same and yet it was. The tactics wouldn’t be all that much different according to some of the older folks’ understanding of the history of the United States. Given the loss of mobility the older people had due to age, it made perfect sense for them to remain in place as the Home Guard. They were armed to the teeth and certainly had the will to fight even if they couldn’t get around so good.

On The Cheap – Chapter 30 – The Home Guard

“What’s this BS about us being the Home Guard?” Ron asked.

“It isn’t BS, Ron,” Gary replied, “Someone has to do it. I just figured that we’d be most effective if we didn’t have to move around too much. You’re 70, Clarence is 69, I’m 68 and Ralph is 65. I figure that those Germans in Floyd will come looking for someplace to hide in the woods around here and we can see how good those HK416s really are.”

“Well,” Clarence huffed, “I don’t know as I want to use a plastic gun to fight the Germans.”

“Why not Clarence, they’re German guns?” Gary asked. “Everything will be equal.”

“No they won’t,” Clarence insisted, “They’re trained soldiers and we’re just a bunch of civilians.”

“But we know the lay of the land,” Gary insisted.

“You know the lay of the land,” Ron retorted, “Clarence and I are strangers in these here parts.”

“You ain’t John Wayne either,” Gary laughed referring to Ron’s imitation of the Duke.

“*Whoa, take 'er easy there, Pilgrim,*” Ron replied, quoting a line from *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*. “I can be anyone I want.”

“I suppose,” Gary admitted, “But best you use an automatic instead of one of those cowboys guns of yours. The only reason John Wayne didn’t use them in his cowboy movies was that they hadn’t been invented yet.”

“Did I show you my Desert Eagle?” Ron asked. “I bought me one of those 6-Inch Mark XIX Component System Packages. It has a .44 Magnum pistol, .50AE 6-inch barrel, .50AE magazine, .357 Magnum 6-inch barrel, .357 bolt assembly and .357 magazine.”

“What did that set you back?” Gary asked.

“Between 2 and 3 grand,” Ron chuckled.

“Must be nice,” Clarence groaned.

“What are you planning on shooting with that .50AE cartridge?” Gary asked APC’s?”

“Naw. I ain’t going to use the .50AE barrel anyway,” Ron explained. “You put in ear plugs, topped with shooting cups and it’s still too damn loud to suit me. I’ll just use the .357 or the .44 magnums, depending upon what mood I’m in.”

In the coming days, The Three Amigos and Ralph, plus a number of the ladies, guarded the cave while the younger people began to harass the Germans. The fact that the US military was finally attacking the UN forces only made it easier for the militia groups. But, this wasn't the 1770's and the Germans had body armor with plates and those 5.56s were hard pressed to kill the enemy. Hell, they couldn't even do it with the M1As, or at least not with body shots. The PASGT helmet has been a success. It has been adopted by most of the US's tactical police teams in dangerous situations for the protection it offers. PASGT helmets, or close copies, have been adopted by Canada, México, Spain, France, Germany, Italy, Austria, Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Serbia, Estonia, Croatia, Australia, Japan, Philippines, Indonesia and even China.

The PASGT had a rating of IIIA, so headshots were out. However, nobody wears body armor on his or her legs. As a result of a poorly placed shot in the heat of the moment, the militias figured out that they could shoot the Germans in the legs and then move closer and either shoot them or use hand grenades. And, they just as quickly discovered that those M406 HE grenades for the M203's were even better than the wound and kill routine. They also had a supply of the M1001 Canister rounds, but I hate to mention them for fear of renewing the debate over flechettes. Fortunately the Germans used 4-point restraint systems in their vehicles.

Every day the younger people went out and harassed the Germans and every day the old folks turned out the Home Guard. Ralph armed himself with a M1A and a M1911. Ron preferred his M16A2 with M406 HE grenades and his Desert Eagle with either the .357 or .44 magnum barrels depending upon his mood. Clarence and Gary armed themselves with the captured German G36A2/AG36 combination and the M576 40mm grenades filled with 20 rounds of #4 buckshot. Both of the men used M1911's. The women generally opted for the M16A3's and those useless M9 pistols. Derek had insisted that at the end of every day they empty their magazines and reload the ammo into magazines that had been left to 'rest' for 24 hours. Over a period of 2 weeks, they had accumulated so much German equipment that they had magazines to spare for the G36A2 rifles.

They were also accumulating a large quantity of the PASGT helmets and PASGT-V body armor. PASGT was a thing of the past. Current issue body armor was Interceptor and current issue helmet was the MICH and/or the Advanced Combat Helmet which was a modified MICH.

They had taken a stab or two at rooting out the Germans in Floyd, but the Germans wouldn't show themselves and no one wanted to blow up the Keppel Restaurant. So, they just stationed guards near the restaurant and sniped at the Germans every time they showed their heads, which was becoming less frequent. The tanks in Charles City were taken out of commission by AT-4's from behind. And, town-by-town, they were eliminating the German soldiers. Casualties for the lowans were fairly light considering

the force they were up against. But, they weren't fighting by the Marquis of Queensbury rules, so that was to be expected.

The new LW body armor provided improved ballistic protection at a reduced weight. The Land Warrior body armor included a modular upgrade plate to protect the soldier against the small arms threat. The protective clothing and individual equipment subsystem incorporated modular body armor and upgraded plates that could stop small-arms rounds fired point-blank. Does that mean that the body armor was made by Point Blank, the Interceptor people? Probably. Anyway the Interceptor OTV still wasn't available to foreign customers, so the US had a leg or two up on the UN forces.

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Three weeks into the month-long bombing campaign, the Army moved several Brigades into the Washington, DC area and made arrests. They didn't try to sort out the good guys from the bad guys; they just locked up the whole bunch from the President on down. They also stopped by Langley, VA and invited those folks to join the other branches of government. What, is the CIA now a branch of government? Well, you might think so after the Congress got off the dime and passed the Senate's version of the legislation generated in response to the 9/11 Report.

Most of the UN armor had been decimated by the air assaults and the remaining stuff was the older stuff that lacked the range of the Abrams M1A2SEP with the MRM rounds. On the high seas, the Navy was outdoing even its own expectations and fairly quickly the UN forces began to run low on supplies. They tried to airlift in some supplies, but they had lost air supremacy and the American fighters shot down the aircraft. By the end of the fourth week there weren't many of anybody to fight anymore. The UN couldn't declare its mission accomplished because the UN didn't exist anymore. But, the Germans and French and the other 40 or so nations had had enough.

They offered to surrender and return home if the US would allow them to do so. After reasonable reflection, the Joint Chiefs of Staff accepted their offer. You never knew if someday the US might need the help of the Europeans. And, as quickly as it had apparently begun, the fighting was over and the US was left with a terrible mess to clean up. No, the story isn't over, not quite yet!

Article III § 2

The judicial power shall extend to all cases, in law and equity, arising under this Constitution, the laws of the United States, and treaties made, or which shall be made, under their authority;—to all cases affecting ambassadors, other public ministers and consuls;—to all cases of admiralty and maritime jurisdiction;—to controversies to which the United States shall be a party;—to controversies between two or more states;—between a state and citizens of another state;—between citizens of different states;—between citizens of the same state claiming lands under grants of different states, and between a state, or the citizens thereof, and foreign states, citizens or subjects.

In all cases affecting ambassadors, other public ministers and consuls, and those in which a state shall be party, the Supreme Court shall have original jurisdiction. In all the other cases before mentioned, the Supreme Court shall have appellate jurisdiction, both as to law and fact, with such exceptions, and under such regulations as the Congress shall make.

The trial of all crimes, except in cases of impeachment, shall be by jury; and such trial shall be held in the state where the said crimes shall have been committed; but when not committed within any state, the trial shall be at such place or places as the Congress may by law have directed.

§ 3 Treason against the United States, shall consist only in levying war against them, or in adhering to their enemies, giving them aid and comfort. No person shall be convicted of treason unless on the testimony of two witnesses to the same overt act, or on confession in open court.

The Congress shall have power to declare the punishment of treason, but no attainder of treason shall work corruption of blood, or forfeiture except during the life of the person attainted.

Article II § 4

The President, Vice President and all civil Officers of the United States, shall be removed from Office on Impeachment for, and Conviction of, Treason, Bribery, or other high Crimes and Misdemeanors.

It seems pretty clear that some of the officials of the US could be impeached for treason, having given aid and comfort to the UN forces. Others could be tried for treason in a court of law for the same reason. Still others would never see the inside of Congress or a courtroom. The evidence of the treason lay in the Congressional Record and in the signed Bill. The Vice President claimed he knew nothing about the whole affair and absent any evidence to convict him of treason, he was allowed to quietly resign. The members of Congress were tried in court for treason and the only evidence present by the prosecutor was the Congressional Record.

Article I § 6

Clause 1: The Senators and Representatives shall receive a Compensation for their Services, to be ascertained by Law, and paid out of the Treasury of the United States. (See Note 6) They shall in all Cases, except Treason, Felony and Breach of the Peace, be privileged from Arrest during their Attendance at the Session of their respective Houses, and in going to and returning from the same; and for any Speech or Debate in either House, they shall not be questioned in any other Place.

Why the lesson in Constitutional Law? Well... First, the military cleaned out Congress and the remaining members of the House and Senate issued the Bill of Impeachment and tried the President, and all civil Officers of the United States. Then the House Minority Leader ended up President and he called upon the remaining congressional leaders to call for special elections. It was a very confused time in Washington and no one was exactly sure if they were doing what the Constitution demanded or not. Old TOM, out there in Iowa had no idea what was right and what wasn't. But, they were making an attempt to restore the Republic, so he didn't care.

The Presidential Succession Act of 1947 didn't envision the President, Vice President, President Pro Tempore of the Senate, and all of the Cabinet Officers being removed from office for treason. "A terrorist attack wipes out the seat of government. The president, vice president, representatives and senators are all dead – except for a group of six freshmen House members who were in the Congo on a humanitarian mission. Under current law, these six lawmakers could return to Washington, select one of them as the new House speaker and that person could become the acting president instead of the Secretary of State who would otherwise be next in line." Source: Orange County Register, June 6, 2003. You do see the problem facing the US, don't you?

"Surely some of the Cabinet Secretaries must have objected to what the President was doing," Clarence suggested.

"If they did, they didn't say anything," Ralph opined.

"Doesn't make much difference the way I see it," Gary said. "The Constitution might never have envisioned what happened, but they seemed to have hit on a scheme that worked."

"At least the order of succession didn't include Geraldo," Ron laughed. "You like Geraldo, right Gar-Bear?"

"I just love him to death Ronald," Gary replied. "600-yards."

The End? Or, a new beginning?

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